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**Madwomen Agents: Common Experiences in British Imperial, Postcolonial,
and Bedouin Women's Writing**

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Abstract

British imperial culture and indigenous patriarchy both work to subjugate women. There is very little room for resistance. Madness as protest is a dominant theme in Victorian literature as well as late twentieth-century postcolonial writing by women. This thesis refashions our understanding of the madwoman trope by investigating writers' use of it to capture the diverse experiences of 'other' madwomen. Instead of a strictly Eurocentric approach to female protagonists' experiences of madness, the thesis places British imperial literary culture in the nineteenth century alongside postcolonial writing by women, whether in the Caribbean (Dominica), South Asia (India) or the Middle East (Jordan and Egypt). Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* and Miral Al-Tahawy's *The Tent* are placed alongside Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. A transnational approach is necessary to establish commonality between Eastern and Western women's literary experiences of madness. Such commonality persistently emerges, once one is alert to its possibility, despite the often obvious differences between literary madwomen's experiences in a transnational frame. The relationship between madness and empire, madness and patriarchy, and madwomen as agents of resistance is exemplified throughout the thesis by closely analysing each literary text.

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Introduction: Madwomen and Empire, Madwomen and Patriarchy

“Revolution is born from the womb of tragedy” –Nizar Qabbani¹

Women, having always been identified with ‘emotion’ and the body, rather than reason, have a certain power to threaten and disrupt universal ideologies that are constantly working to re-enforce women’s subjugation. This thesis aims to investigate literary representations of madwomen figures who protest against their respective societies and environments. When we think of the figure of the “madwoman” we immediately think of the madwoman in the attic, the crazy, grotesque figure that haunts Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. In a sense, she is the prototype of the “madwoman” figure. The goal of this project is to elucidate other representations and meanings of the “madwoman”, using the Victorian prototype as a stepping stone. I examine other experiences of female madness by placing the Victorian madwoman alongside the Postcolonial and Bedouin madwoman, by placing East/West alongside each other, and attempting to displace the dichotomy that divides them. What I would suggest is that Eastern women, colonised women, and Bedouin women share the same dichotomous subjugation as Western women. This is not to undermine or ignore their specificities and differences, but instead to evoke a wider perception, and not a narrow vision, rather a multifaceted madwoman trope. This study is

¹ From Nizar Qabbani’s poem ‘Beirut, Mistress of the World’. Qabbani was a Syrian poet who wrote for and about women, criticized oppressive political regimes, and attempted to liberate women’s bodies. The poem is concerned with how Beirut has been taken advantage of, raped, and killed. The motherland also symbolizes a woman’s body, and Qabbani insists that revolution is only born from the womb of grief. My usage of the quotation here is to emphasize the significance of the womb, the maternal –the feminine. All of the madwomen figures protest and attempt their own individual revolt because of tragedy, grief and oppression. See: *On Entering the Sea: The Erotic and Other Poetry of Nizar Qabbani*.

primarily based on textual analyses that emphasise the ways in which the madwoman trope cuts across national and literary boundaries. What emerges instead of a dichotomy of the Western madwoman/Eastern madwoman is a bridge that enables connections and serves as a reminder of common female experience; experience that is the result of the British Empire's ideologies, colonial relations with the other, and patriarchal oppression within the domestic space.

This thesis takes a transnational feminist approach, focusing on establishing common links between the literary texts and the manifestations of female subjugation, cutting across national frontiers and cultures. The network of texts I have chosen works together to emphasize human commonality rather than difference. By reading these texts as interrelated and parallel to each other, I attempt to suspend and dislocate oppositional structures of East/West, and Eastern women versus Western women. Throughout my reading of the texts, I focus on the common oppression shared across these borders and boundaries, and challenge the dichotomous thought that has (ever since colonialism and imperialism) separated and elevated the West and the Western woman above her Eastern counterpart. I am not arguing for a universal status of the "madwoman" or woman, but rather, attempting to create a new terrain of different madwomen whose experiences are, at the end of the day, comparable to each other, despite geographical, historical, and cultural differences. The Victorian madwoman who is locked up, then, is not altogether different from the Postcolonial and/or Bedouin madwoman, who are confined not in the attic or a Victorian bourgeois home, but rather, a tent, a room, an asylum, and most significantly, a space of confinement that is the result of both colonialism and patriarchy. The confinement is not limited to the attic or any other physical space, but rather, it is limitless. The confinement is culturally and imperially constructed; it is an enslavement that women struggle to break free from. The journey they embark upon is a journey away from patriarchal and Empire

ideologies, specifically a journey into the self. The female protagonists retreat into their inner worlds, their psyches, and an internal domain that offers an alternative to the externally oppressive environments that they suffer from.

The othering of women has happened throughout history, across different national, geographical, and cultural borders. This othering process has no doubt written itself on both women's minds and bodies, regardless of race, culture, or social class. As such, madness is experienced by different classes of women, different cultures, and in different ways by different women. In their difference, there is sameness, as the dichotomy of same/different must also be called into question, must also be deconstructed, and reveal the inextricable interconnectedness of the two oppositions. This project aims to pluralize the images of madwomen, considering cultural and geopolitical specificities under the umbrella of sameness or commonality. Yet at the same time, I am aware of the particularities of each madwoman's experience, keeping each literary figure and text in its historical and cultural context, and I attempt to address the specificity of the texts and the different, yet not dissimilar, experiences of madness that they embody. In my research, I consider a selection of texts from different literary periods, different cultures, and authors of different backgrounds: Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* (1996), and Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent* (1996). I use this range of texts to examine the experience of the madwoman, attempting to re-investigate and re-invent the "madwoman in the attic" paradigm in order to encompass the experiences of the "other" madwoman, focusing on different cultures and spaces of

confinement.² The selection of these texts has been made on the basis of two important principles. First, all of the texts are written by women and centre on a strictly female experience of living, and of course, the experience of madness and exclusion. Second, the texts are taken both from canonical works (the Victorian fiction) and established as well as emerging writers. My choice is an attempt to form a bridge between popular texts and lesser known texts. As for the specific choices of Bedouin fiction, while there was a wide variety to choose from, ultimately it was a matter of finding which texts converse the most with the madwoman trope.

It is imperative to note that I am aware of the differences between actual madness and the experience of madness as portrayed in literature. I do not wish to obliterate the lived experiences of madness, nor do I intend to homogenize the experience; as such the narratives that I have chosen deal with different types of madness and disability. In *Madness: A Brief History*, Roy Porter claims that “all societies judge some people mad: any strict clinical justification aside, it is part of the business of marking out the different, deviant, and perhaps dangerous” (62). This statement supports my research’s claim that women who aim to break down cultural, ideological, and social structures are labelled as “mad.” Whether they are actually clinically mad or merely stigmatized as mentally inferior is a question that shall be addressed by referring to textual representations of “madwomen” in literature. How do writers portray this “madwoman?” She is not always condemned to the attic, as in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*; rather she is a moving being, always in a state of being and becoming. She is a Western woman, she is an Eastern

² Recently, a Call for Papers was circulated, entitled *Aesthetics of Resistance: Madness in Black Women’s Fictions and the Practice of Diaspora* (2013). This CFP urged for the incorporation of ‘Black Women’ into the trope of the madwoman, away from Anglo-centric texts. I submitted an abstract which was refused on the basis that Bedouin madwomen were not considered part of ‘black’ or postcolonial fiction. See: <http://africandiasporaphd.tumblr.com/post/58938308960/cfp-aesthetics-of-resistance-madness-in-black-womens>

woman, she is a colonised woman, she is a Victorian woman, and she is a daughter, a wife, a mother. Some of the female protagonists are deemed “mad” because their behaviour is considered aberrant and/or deviant. We see this in the case of Ammu in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Ammu is considered a “bad” woman, and in this case, bad becomes a synonym for mad. Another example occurs in Al-Tahawy’s *The Tent*, where madness becomes synonymous with the bodily experience of disability. Fatima is considered a mad invalid, different from the norm of accepted femininity; her immobility renders her unwomanly; a grotesque figure. In all of the texts I have chosen to work with, the female protagonists are socially marginalized or excluded, *considered* mad, and are thus abjected from society.

The theme of madness and madwomen protagonists is a textual strategy, one that makes use of fragmentation that unsettles the readers. The texts do not provide a sense of completeness or closure; they are fictions of fragmentation, of gaps and inconsistencies, multilayered discourses of otherness, and a sense of disintegration. There are multiple tensions that must be reconciled within the madwomen’s volatile environments and their inner consciousness. The protagonists are not ‘normal’ in any sense, they are different and deviant, and their endings are culminated in madness and/or death. This textual strategy of employing madness is used by women writers to speak out against both patriarchy and Empire, and it is the madwomen protagonists who are able to embody agency.

My thesis is invested in madwomen figures as embodied agents, whether through their experience of madness or physical disability. In fictional texts, madness and disability cannot be ignored; they are potent forces that shed light on discourses of race, gender, and otherness. I am concerned with the experiences of madness, invalidism and disability in literary narratives because of their potential to disrupt any discourse of normalization. Lennard Davis’s work on

disability is significant in the field of Disability Studies. In *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism and Other Difficult Positions*, he argues that disability is a discursive category, and examines the relationship between disability and normality in the light of postmodern theory. He claims that disability is a “new category...seen as continuous, running the gamut from physical impairments to deformity to monstrosity to madness” (57). Ideas of disability and who falls into the category of the ‘disabled’ remain unclear and fluid; disability encompasses an extraordinary range of physical, psychiatric, and cognitive attributes. As such, my thesis proposes that madwomen figures in literary narratives (written by women) are part of a larger scope of deviant figures that are excluded from the discourse of normalcy. The fictional madwoman figure is either mentally deranged, has a bout of madness which then manifests itself physically, or is *both* mad and physically disabled. My aim remains to juxtapose diverse narratives of Western and Eastern fictional madwomen and their confrontation of patriarchy (whether metropolitan British or indigenous in colonised spaces) and colonial and neocolonial race and gender oppression.

The *Bildungsroman* has been conceptualized in different works that examine fictions of female development. My study is interested in the various ways that the *Bildungsroman* is played out in the works of fiction I have chosen to analyse in-depth. The pattern of the female *Bildungsroman* has accommodated different forms of individual growth. Instead of the traditional structure of the *Bildungsroman*, the narrative concludes differently. Gender is integrated with the traditional genre, observing what the female experience of growth is, thus redefining the genre’s strict definitions of plot and the protagonist’s successful integration into society. Stella Bolaki’s *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women’s Fiction* is a relatively new addition to the *Bildungsroman* interrogation. The subject of

Bolaki's study is Ethnic American literature and she contextualizes the genre and expands it to fit deviations from the traditional genre, specifically how trauma, illness, and mother-daughter relationships fit into the paradigm. I take guidance from Bolaki's study to incorporate how postcolonial and Bedouin fiction negotiate the protagonists' inner and external conflicts. Growth is not a linear process, but rather, it is fragmented, and on the protagonists' own terms, given their respective societies and environment. Maturity is negotiated within multiple tensions and sites of trauma, most significantly the terrain of Empire ideologies and patriarchy. All of the texts in this study are invested in the interaction with race and class typical of the Ethnic American female *Bildungsromane*.

The influence of race and gender on the madwoman trope and the *Bildungsroman* genre is intrinsic to this study. The literary representations of madwomen figures help bring the shared experiences of gender and racial oppression to the surface. By re-examining Victorian representations of madwomen figures, I aim to highlight the ways by which Victorian culture was oppressive in its class, gender, and racial politics. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts in her acclaimed essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism": "It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (262). The Victorian texts I have chosen accentuate the racial and gender politics that subjugate and eventually annihilate women. I place two of the canonical works of the Brontës next to Postcolonial and Bedouin fiction; Postcolonial and Bedouin fiction usually present oppressed female characters who are subjected to both patriarchal and colonial rule. The texts I have chosen not only share similar themes, but also, they evoke images of madness as resistance to both Empire and patriarchal ideologies. In the Victorian texts, there is

no mother figure. Both Catherine and Jane do not have mothers; they are orphans, dealing with patriarchal relations at home. The British Empire and its imperial ideologies facilitate patriarchal relations; in a sense, the Empire comes to stand in metonymically for white male supremacy, the father figure who introduces imperial ideologies of class and race, controlling both the public and the private sphere. In striking contrast, the female heroines in *The God of Small Things*, *Pillars of Salt*, and *The Tent* have mother figures and strong mother-daughter relationships. Mother figures feature in these texts as a form of female solidarity, and typically they encourage a revolt against patriarchal oppression. Of course, there are some exceptions. Some female characters appear as the agents of patriarchal oppression, but it is evident that they suffer from the worst type of oppression, whereby the oppressed becomes the oppressor. Generally though, the mother figure also symbolizes the motherland, the land that fights against the British Empire, and resists colonial contact. The mother figure, then, is an important mechanism in the Eastern texts, exemplifying a crucial difference from the metropole. Other themes are repeated across the different texts, across different time periods and cultures. There is an undeniable central theme of madness and the madwoman as a figure of protest. Subthemes are also repeated, such as patriarchy, marriage, domesticity, mothering and child-bearing. External factors pressure and threaten to annihilate any female subjectivity and/or sense of self.

Throughout my thesis, I use Julia Kristeva's work on abjection, given that it is most fitting for the discussion of the multiple traumas to which the female protagonists are subjected. I am aware that Kristeva's work is part of a long tradition of French Feminist Psychoanalysis, but my focus is not on French Feminist theory, as the aim of this study remains one that emphasizes commonality, rather than ethnic-minority-specificity within feminism. My emphasis is on the Kristevan concepts of abjection, the mother as either object or lack, and how these concepts

relate to the protagonists' experience of madness within the texts. Abjection is inextricably linked with the loss of self and identity; the madwomen are abjected and excluded from 'proper' society and thus they become the object itself.

Intertextuality is necessary for reading the network of texts this thesis explores. The idea of relationality between texts poses one way of understanding the way in which texts speak to each other, regardless of historical and literary time periods. Graham Allen's *Intertextuality* outlines some of the major theorists' work on intertextuality, including M.M. Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and Harold Bloom.³ I make use of the term intertextuality because "it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness, and interdependence in modern cultural life" (5). Weaving the texts I have chosen together, I take the idea of intertextuality to foreground how texts from different cultures and historical periods can be read together, and in fact, repeat similar themes. As Allen notes: "However it is used, the term intertextuality promotes a new vision of meaning, and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy" (6). Not only does this project focus on recurrent themes and motifs in writings by female authors, but also, it aims to resist any rigid dichotomous thought that renders the East and/or Eastern women invisible. My use of intertextuality here argues that Bedouin writing ought to be taken into consideration in order to maintain the "wholeness" of Postcolonial literature. Works of literature are influenced by each other and continue to repeat similar tropes, and that is to say, there is no absolute uniqueness to the English madwoman, but rather, there is a commonality to all Anglophone post-nineteenth-century literature that features madwomen figures.

³Allen asserts that poststructuralist critics "employ the term intertextuality to disrupt notions of meaning, whilst structuralist critics employ the same to locate and even fix literary meaning" (2). Allen recognizes that the term itself is flexible and is used differently by different theorists, including feminist and postcolonial theorists.

The recurrent theme of madness in literary works written by women in the English and American traditions poses multiple questions. In *The Madwoman in the Attic* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that madness in nineteenth century literature was a theme that women writers adopted, as well as “dramatizations of imprisonment and escape....we believe they represent a uniquely female tradition in this period” (85). Like Gilbert and Gubar, I argue that there is something very distinctively “female” in the writings of the women writers I have selected, and that perhaps a new tradition is in order, one that encompasses the “other madwoman” and brings the Victorian madwoman closer to her Eastern counterpart. Gilbert and Gubar maintain that:

It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters. Recently, in fact, social scientists and social historians like Jessie Bernard, Phyllis Chesler, Naomi Weisstein, and Pauline Bart have begun to study the ways in which patriarchal socialization literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally (53).

In the same vein, this project aims to find the parallel connections that “make women sick” while expanding the madwoman paradigm to include different texts and cultures, that still resonate with the Victorian madwoman trope. A study like Gilbert and Gubar’s was Eurocentric in its approach, but nevertheless, remains indispensable for women’s literary history. I find their argument regarding patriarchal conditions that drive women mad particularly useful, and it will be referred to throughout the chapters.

It is crucial to historicize the emergence of madness and its repercussions. Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* is considered one of the most influential works on mental illness, a great contribution to the sciences and the arts. Foucault argues that madness is not necessarily a biological or natural state, but is socially

constructed and sustained by oppressive societies which aim to control, regulate, and monitor human behaviour. Foucault has studied the institutionalization of madness and humankind's fear of "the bestiality of the madman...The mentally ill person was now a subhuman and beastly scapegoat; hence the need to protect others" (vii). Perhaps the biggest downfall of Foucault's work is its preoccupation with the West's views on madness, yet it remains indispensable to the study of madness. It is crucial to note that his text will only serve here as offering a general understanding of madness, rather than a specific examination of women's madness and even more precisely, Eastern women's plight.

For Foucault, madness and sanity are mutually constructed. He speaks of the "man of madness and the man of reason, moving apart, are not yet disjunct...Here madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist" (x). Sanity and insanity are dualistic oppositions, but for Foucault, they are coexisting. The question of madness in Foucault's text deals with Western notions of reason and unreason, what constitutes both, and how society had perceived those who failed to behave within the reason framework. Western culture went through a series of reactions to madness, or what was deemed as "unreason." At the end of the Middle Ages, "madness and the madman [became] major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men" (13). The madman, so to speak, was able to enunciate reality and reason through his utterances of unreason. He was able to provide, or speak, "love to lovers, the truth of life to the young, the middling reality of things to the proud, to the insolent, and to liars" (14). Perhaps even more so is the madwoman, who in her madness is able to threaten the patriarchal order. In the selections of texts I have chosen, the madwoman figure is a figure of protest that almost always speaks out against the hegemonic order, and uncannily is the

voice of wisdom. Her voice is the voice of true reason, the voice that the author employs to critique society and women's subjugation.

In the four texts I have chosen, madness is the gateway to an individual revolution. Only through madness are the madwomen able to access a different reality. Sufism, for example, calls for the breakdown of the ego, demolishing boundaries of selfhood, in order to find a larger, universal truth of being and existence. Madness is sacred in Sufism because it entails a loss of self for a higher purpose. Karen Armstrong suggests that this state of annihilation, which is called "*fana*" in Arabic, is the end of the experience of separation, and leads to "a sense of absorption into a larger, ineffable reality" (268). Perhaps what these fictional madwomen do is an act of "*fana*" and a protest that does dissolve the self in order to find, or call for a better reality. In "The Wisdom of Intoxication: Love and Madness in the Poetry of Hafiz of Shiraz", James Newell argues that for the Sufi, madness is not necessarily chaotic, especially if it involves a "conscious union with the source of all things" (202). The union is usually with God, a higher being, and an escape from everyday life to a better alternative. Newell suggests:

When madness is understood in this way, as a spiritual experience, the idea parallels the Jungian idea of individuation, a process which necessarily involves a breakdown and transformation of conscious structures of the personality, in order to make room for the inclusion of other, previously unconscious, contents of the personality (202).

Divine madness for the Sufi is a state of existence that requires an act of surrender and a breakdown of the ego. The reward goes beyond the 'average' understanding of sanity/insanity and this everyday life. Madwomen characters in the four texts reach a state of annihilation that is enlightening, producing an epiphany (although not religious in any sense) that calls for change.

Perhaps an indispensable theoretical introduction to women's madness is Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*. Showalter's work, unlike Foucault's, assesses the madness of women, specifically in English culture and history without regard to Empire. This, of course, is yet another potential limitation, whereby Eastern women's suffering is not taken into account. However, Showalter's work usefully engages with questions of madness and confinement, domesticity, and women's subordination in Victorian culture. Showalter's analysis of Victorian culture and literary representations of madwomen is insightful and will provide much theoretical background for the foundation of the project. She explains:

The rise of the Victorian madwoman was one of history's self-fulfilling prophecies. In a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the asylums much of their population... Thus medical and political policies were mutually reinforcing. As women's demands became increasingly problematic for Victorian society as a whole, the achievement of the psychiatric profession in managing women's minds would offer both a mirror of cultural attitudes and a model for other institutions (72-3).

As a consequence of European imperial and colonial rule, the Western psychiatric profession was able to manage women's minds in both the East and the West. As the coloniser brought along Victorian ideologies to the colonised, the Master was able to write the Slave, the West was able to write the East, and to use Edward Said's term, orientalise the East and Eastern women. As such, there has always been a desire to control, colonise, tame, and conquer beastly Eastern women, who in more ways than one represent the colonised land. With all their allure

and “mysteries” Eastern women became doubly oppressed, doubly marginalized, and doubly feared. As with all ideological and cultural hierarchies, the West was placed above the East, the Western men above Eastern men, Western women above Eastern women, and so on. The list is endless. What concerns me is the idea of Western women as occupying a sort of “positional superiority” which elevates her falsely over Eastern women (Said 7). Only in a false dialogue between East and West building on an ideological construction of absolute difference does this hold. I propose a “contrapuntal” reading that focuses on different experiences, as Edward Said suggests in “Discrepant Experiences”, a reading that requires us to think about commonality and human experience (28). When we focus on First World Feminists and the Western woman’s experience, or the specificity of Third World Women’s experiences, our perspective becomes limited, even though the initial aim of these theoretical practices is to be specific and adequate. As Said argues: “The difficulty with theories of essentialism and exclusiveness, or with barriers and sides, is that they give rise to polarisations that absolve and forgive ignorance and demagoguery more than they enable knowledge” (27). There must be an emphasis on comparative perspectives and contrapuntal readings to be able to interpret together different experiences in order to arrive at a human commonality and establish common ground. This includes looking at different works of literature and placing them alongside each other and establishing a dialogue between them and a common language.

Throughout this project, by looking at various representations of Eastern and Western women in different cultures and histories, we grasp a more “truthful” knowledge of the falsity of the dichotomy and the ultimate need for deconstruction of the difference and superiority presumptions. Chandra Mohanty offers a compelling and convincing argument:

So in this political/economic context, what would an economically and socially just feminist politics look like? ... It would require recognizing that sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism underlie and fuel social and political institutions of rule and thus often lead to hatred of women and (supposedly justified) violence against women. The interwoven processes of sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism are an integral part of our social fabric, wherever in the world we happen to be (3).

Part of the “violence” against women that is “justified” is through the image of the madwoman, as in, for example, Bertha Mason’s image. However this violence extends beyond the limits of “hatred.” It stems from a patriarchal, racist, misogynistic fear of women, no matter where they come from and which national frontiers they are limited to. Mohanty stresses the importance of highlighting the differences between First World and Third World women, and she urges a plurality of female identities: “In other words, systems of racial, class, and gender domination do not have identical effects on women in Third World contexts” (55). Mohanty upholds the idea of difference and the importance of citing these differences between women so as not consciously to ignore or overlook specific differences of cultural and historical arenas. As the chapters move along, I remain aware of such differences and I do not claim there is one madwoman, or one experience of madness, but instead, I argue for a multifaceted image of the madwoman, one that includes, rather than excludes the Eastern madwoman.

Oppositional structures and dichotomies uphold borders and boundaries between Self/other, male/female, West/East, mother/daughter, culture/nature, abled/disabled, and many other sets of binaries. In *Mappings* Susan Friedman asserts that “Borders have a way of insisting on separation at the same time as they acknowledge connection. Like bridges. Bridges signify the possibility of passing over...Borders also specify the liminal space in between...the site of

interaction, interconnection, and exchange” (3). Throughout my reading, I attempt to highlight these dichotomies that rely on borders and boundaries, while stressing the way by which these borders/boundaries are also permeable and can be understood as bridges of connection. Friedman notes that feminism is now concerned with “the geopolitics of identity” and acknowledging differences between cultures and women’s identities. At the same time, it is imperative to remain aware of connections and similarities, rather than simply difference. There is a great fear of falsely universalizing experience and consequently obliterating difference and specificity, so much so that any notion of commonality is now looked at cautiously and questionably. This project attempts to forge a bridge, a new understanding of a specifically female commonality, which has been overshadowed by feminist debates upholding difference.

There has been a constant stress on the idea of difference and uniqueness, which ultimately has subordinated the idea of sameness. Diana Fuss takes up the debate between essentialists and social constructionists in ‘The Risk of Essence’ in *Essentially Speaking*. She recognizes the tension between the two polarities and the division amongst feminists:

It could be said that the tension produced by the essentialist/constructionist debate is responsible for some of feminist theory’s greatest insights, that is, the very tension is constitutive of the field of feminist theory. But it can also be maintained that this same dispute has created the current impasse in feminism, an impasse predicated on the difficulty of theorizing the social in relation to the natural, or the theoretical in relation to the political. The very confusion over whether or not the essentialist/constructionist tension is beneficial or detrimental to the health of feminism is itself overdetermined and constrained by the terms of the opposition in question (665).

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the debates between Essentialists and Anti-Essentialists have been a major concern for feminism. Feminists rejected Essentialism, afraid of any universal claims that might overlook specificity and ethnic minorities; in a sense the fear of being politically or racially oppressive continued to haunt feminists. In 1988 Denise Riley's '*Am I That Name?*' argued that "feminism must 'speak women', while at the same time, an acute awareness of its vagaries is imperative" (113). For Riley, if we are to accept the category of 'women' then this is not altogether limiting, and we can at least suggest a shared commonality and identification among women. She claims that "the troubles of 'women' ...aren't unique. But aren't they arguably peculiar in that 'women', half the human population, do suffer from an extraordinary weight of characterisation?" (16) Even when we remain vigilant about the importance of not homogenising women's experiences, and paying attention to specificities and differences, eventually we end up with the category of 'women.'

By the 1990s, Anti-Essentialist feminists found no common ground or position that women could share. In 1988, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" first appeared in *Feminist Review* and questioned ethnocentric beliefs about the universality of women. She stresses the importance of difference between women and their experiences. While Mohanty's argument is necessary in avoiding a monolithic view of women, it also focuses extensively on articulating differences between First World and Third World Women. She remains wary of assuming a shared oppression between women:

The homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials, but rather on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals. Thus, for instance, in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression...Sisterhood cannot

be assumed on the basis on gender; it must be formed in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis (262).

Mohanty is concerned with how Western feminists construct and stereotype the experiences of Third World women. Her argument speaks against cultural and racial assumptions and calls for specificity. Yet the polarities remain – the borders between First and Third World women remain rigidly fixed and upheld. I argue that we need to look beyond the sameness/difference debates. In any society, there are systems of race, class, and sex oppression, varying degrees of female subjugation, but they remain a shared reality.

I argue that the idea of difference tends to forget that no culture and/or literary work stands alone. Influence is everywhere. That is the precise significance of drawing connections and finding parallels. In “Borders and Bridges” Ngugi Wa Thiong’o insists: “It is only when we see real connections that we can meaningfully talk about differences, similarities, and identities. So the border, seen as a bridge, is founded on the recognition that no culture is an island unto itself. It has been influenced by other cultures and other histories with which it has come into contact” (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader* 391). Ngugi recognizes the challenges of finding and establishing these connections within the field of literature. He emphasizes the interrelation between literature and society as “the challenge to see connections between literature and that wholeness we call society, a wholeness constituted by all that comes under economics, politics, and the environment” (392). My thesis adds Bedouin literature to the category of Postcolonial literature, calling for an integration of Bedouin writing into the field, in order to stretch the bridge of connections and add to the wholeness of literature written in the aftermath of British imperial ambitions and attempts at colonization in the Middle East and Arab world.

Organization of Chapters:

The first chapter of the thesis will focus on reading *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) as examples of the forces of patriarchy and racism that were a part of imperial ideology and beliefs. I begin the thesis with these canonical works in order to emphasise the ways in which Victorian ideology and culture were particularly oppressive and sexist – not to mention infested with racial discrimination and intolerance. That very same ideology paved the way for the legitimization of British colonialism abroad. As such, English women’s suffering bears a striking similarity to postcolonial or Eastern women’s. In Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine loves the “other”, Heathcliff, who is victim to the social restraints and racist ideologies of Victorian culture. He is branded as “dark” and “other” at the very beginning of the novel and denied any human traits, until the reader begins to regard him as the villain of the novel, rather than merely a product of discrimination. Catherine, I suggest, is driven mad because of patriarchal dominance and Victorian white-male ideology that ultimately leads Catherine down a path of self-destruction and self-annihilation. Heathcliff’s suffering comes into play as the supremacy of social class prevails over his sense of self, his own dignity and humanity. The circle of racial, ideological, and social hatred exemplifies a never-ending cycle of gruesomeness and viciousness that remains a dominant feature of the text. The couple’s desire for each other becomes a transgression in itself, yet society separates them, and Catherine is unable to keep that part of herself which she so cherishes: Heathcliff. Catherine’s bout of madness is mitigated by an emotional death and subsequently a literal, physical death. Her rebellion begins very early on, through her choice of lover, and ends with her will to write her own ending.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is read alongside Jean Rhys's rewriting of the text, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. When analysing *Jane Eyre*, I look for the sexual and racial politics at hand, along with the treatment of illness and disability within the text. I read Jane's journey, like Catherine's, as a *Bildungsroman*. Jane and Bertha, or Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, are almost always read as each other's doubles or opponents. This part of the project outlines the major readings of both texts, the debates surrounding the two characters, and proposes a reading that focuses on both their experiences with the same man, Mr. Rochester. Like her predecessor, Jane is, in a sense, controlled and manipulated by Mr. Rochester. However, Jane is able to fit into his beliefs and inscriptions of femininity and sanity. Undoubtedly, Bertha is exiled and shunned to make room for the heroine Jane – but not before challenging and disrupting all notions of femininity inscribed upon her by patriarchal and more importantly, colonial ideologies. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a subtle exploration of the damages inflicted by Empire and colonialism on the colonised psyche. In this portion of the project, I aim to underline how madness emerges as a product of colonialism. For Antoinette, the issue of public politics versus private politics is necessary to examine how she is, in a sense, a symbol for all those who are enslaved by the White master. Indisputably, her mind does deteriorate, but it is only through this deterioration that she reclaims her body, as no longer another's property, and consequently, there is a reclaiming of her identity, an identity that Mr. Rochester has attempted to erase all along. Like Catherine, Bertha/Antoinette is confined in a Victorian imperial culture that allowed no room for resistance.

The second chapter addresses the ways by which colonialism and its effects have harmed the postcolonial nation and psyche, specifically the female subject's sense of identity in a chaotic process of failures to decolonise. By focusing on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, a

novel of political and personal turmoil, the thesis attempts to shed light onto the damage that colonialism and the British Empire inflicted upon the personal and the political, within the domestic and public spheres. Patriarchal relations and the caste system of India add fuel to the effects of colonialism. Nickolas Dirks's *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* suggests that British colonialism helped create the caste system as it has come to be. The Ipe family suffer from what I term "assimilation madness", a desire to merge with, and become, the coloniser, while rejecting one's own native identity. Ammu is a mother, and even more specifically a divorced mother – she represents the motherland, the mother who is now divorced from the British Empire and colonialism. She embodies the postcolonial state, and she is the "madwoman" in the text, a figure of protest, a voice that critiques colonialism, assimilation, and the loss of identity. She is a rebellious figure who chooses, like Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, to be with an Untouchable, Velutha, someone who is excluded from society. Like Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship, Ammu and Velutha's affair threatens society, and both private and public spheres. Ammu, like Catherine, is considered a wild woman, even more so, a "bad" woman, someone who is unfit to be a mother, and eventually her sanity is questioned. Ammu eventually becomes extremely ill. Also like Catherine, her body fails her, and the trauma of the mind writes itself onto her body. Ammu's children, Rahel and Estha, suffer from their mother's choices, the loss of the mother, and also follow in her footsteps. I read Rahel and Estha as doubles, and I focus on their own journey, a *Bildungsroman* too (like Catherine's and Jane's), but a postcolonial one also.

The third chapter pursues a new angle on the "Madwoman" by considering Bedouin culture and society and calling for the integration of the Bedouin madwoman into the category of postcolonial feminist fiction. I begin the chapter introducing Bedouin culture, history, and family

politics. Bedouins are a distinct group that have been neglected and overlooked in fiction. There are a few fictional works that deal exclusively with Bedouins and Bedouin culture, and I have selected two: one from Jordan and one from Egypt, both of which deal with the subject of the Bedouin “madwoman.” Fadia Faqir is an Anglophone writer who is interested in Jordanian Bedouin culture and diaspora. She is originally from Jordan, born into a Bedouin family, and left to England to earn her degree in Creative Writing. Her novels include *Nisanit* (1988), *Pillars of Salt, My Name is Salma* (2007), and finally *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). The first, Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*, explores the colonial and postcolonial pressures during and after the British Mandate. Two women tell their different stories and how they have ended confined to a room in a mental institution. The main protagonist, Maha, is a Jordanian Bedouin woman originating from the lineage of an aristocratic tribe. Similarly to Ammu, Maha must face the oppressions of a tribal, colonised/postcolonial society. Ruled by both native patriarchy and British colonisers, there is very little possibility of resistance. Maha's brother, Daffash, like Ammu's brother Chacko, is a British puppet, attempting to assimilate and win the coloniser's approval. Daffash confines Maha to a mental asylum, in the same way that Bertha/Antoinette is confined to the attic, Ammu and Catherine to their bedrooms, and Fatima to a room in the tent. Maha's story intersects with that of her fellow inmate at the asylum, Um Saad. Both Maha and Um Saad's stories deal with issues of patriarchal and colonial/postcolonial domination, social and psychological pressures, as well as distorted perceptions of their bodies and inscriptions that are written on them. They are labelled as dangerous, different, and abnormal. Although Maha is a peasant and Um Saad is a city dweller, in their difference, there is sameness. They form a sisterhood both against the men in their lives and against the English doctor treating them, as they try to resist everything which continues to subjugate them.

In the fourth chapter, the scene is shifted from the Bedouins of Jordan to Egyptian Bedouins. Egyptian writer, Miral Al-Tahawy, is interested in Bedouin culture and identity, having been born to a Bedouin father. Her first novel *Al-Khibaa (The Tent)* came out in 1996, followed by *Al-Badhingana al-zarqa (The Blue Aubergine)*, *Naquarat al-Zibae (Gazelle Tracks)* and recently *Brooklyn Heights* (2012). Al-Tahawy's *The Tent*, like Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* is concerned with what colonialism and imperialism have done to Bedouin culture. The novel, like the rest of the texts I have chosen, is a *Bildungsroman* that ends tragically, with no conflicts solved. Madness is the final culmination of events, as in all of the texts I have examined. At the beginning of *The Tent*, the protagonist is a child, Fatima, who speaks of her mother, who is locked away because she cries all the time. Fatima's mother is a madwoman in the tent, rather than in the attic. She is confined and restrained, and is unable to give birth to sons, which in a Bedouin culture implies that she is "abnormal" and even "evil." I examine the mother-daughter relationship and the way by which Fatima follows in her mother's footsteps. When Fatima's mother dies, she is taken to live with a foreign Orientalist, Anne, who offers to educate her in exchange for Fatima's horse. Fatima's oppression is doubled at this point in the novel. Her sense of identity and self is shattered as she spirals downwards into an ending similar to her mother's: madness and confinement. Fatima is both mentally and physically disabled at the end of the novel, a symbol of her existence outside the accepted "feminine" framework. Fatima, like the female characters in Roy's and Faqir's work, is constantly subjugated by both patriarchy and colonial relations. It is no coincidence that Fatima's leg is amputated by Anne; the relationship between East and West is poisonous to Fatima. The text, like Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*, explores the inextricable links between patriarchy and colonialism, and madness is featured as both a consequence of and a reaction to the oppressing environment.

The conclusion draws together the main arguments in the chapters and re-visits the madness trope in I have considered. The many themes I have analysed include the patriarchal and colonial relations within the domestic space and the public space, culture-specific factors that accentuate the “madwoman’s” condition, the *Bildungsroman*, the mother-daughter relationship in postcolonial texts, abjection and trauma, loss, self-annihilation and alienation, and madness as a breakdown as well as a breakthrough. In the texts I have chosen, madwomen figures speak, but are not heard. Ironically, their words are usually words of wisdom; they have an uncanny ability to diagnose the failures of their societies and criticize the oppressive forces of Empire and patriarchy. There is a paradoxical power of madness that threatens to unravel and vocally criticize previously sanctioned ideologies of oppression. As such, the madwomen are silenced, shunned, and abjected.

This study marks a beginning rather than a comprehensive survey of a vast field, and I do not claim to have included all works that represent the “other” madwoman. My texts are focused on the Victorian era and the 1990s, so as to limit my study to a certain time frame. However, there are a plethora of works that engage with madness in different contexts and time periods. Bedouin fiction, specifically, is a relatively new area and I hope that this study will encourage more research on the representation of Bedouin women in literature, and might be viewed as making a successful case for adding Bedouin writing to the British postcolonial literary canon.

Chapter One: From Imperial to Postcolonial: The Madwoman in *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*,
and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Representations of madness and mad female characters in Victorian fiction have been a subject of scholarly interest and research for decades. There have been seminal studies and texts which examine the correlation between the mad female heroine and her surroundings. *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar is an indispensable aid to approaching this haunting figure of the madwoman and the heroine's (as well as the author's) struggle against patriarchal oppression. Gilbert and Gubar emphasize the anxiety that female authors faced, at a time when literature and writing was "physiologically as well as sociologically impossible" for a woman, because the pen was seen as a metaphorical penis: "If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power" (8). As such, female writers had to create heroines who seized this supposedly inherent otherness and lack in order to recreate meanings of otherness, monstrosities; female characters who turned lack into power. Most of the female characters in Victorian novels suffered from the repression of desire and from Victorian society's expectations. Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* argues that the image of the Victorian and imperial prude is "emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality" (3). For Foucault, power elicited, rather than repressed desire, and sexuality itself became a new kind of discourse that was an initial part of how one defined one's self. Victorian women not only suffered from the burden of such discourse, but patriarchal relations at home were domineering. In *Women's Oppression Today*, Michèle Barrett emphasizes that the term

“patriarchy” ought to be used with caution. Early radical feminist uses of the term, she argues, “invoke an apparently universal and trans-historical category of male dominance...they also frequently ground this dominance in a supposed logic of biological reproduction” (12). Barrett also claims that it is “possible to frame an account of patriarchy from the point of social, rather than biological, relations” (13). I use the term patriarchy throughout this project to refer to patriarchal relations and “patriarchal ideology” without dismissing different historical, race, class, and socioeconomic factors (Barrett 19). Most significant however, is the concept of race in the texts I have chosen to consider in this chapter. Like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” I argue that Victorian literature signifies an overwhelming saturation of the culture with imperialism. Spivak asserts: “It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English” (262). Taking Spivak’s lead as a starting point, I argue that Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* not only reveal imperialist assumptions and racist ideologies, but also, that they are three texts that feature three madwomen and their strikingly similar narratives of female selfhood, desire, and madness. The three texts emphasize Victorian oppressive culture and society, sexism, class hierarchies, and racial/colonial ideologies that reinstate gender and class subordination. British women were mentally and emotionally colonised and othered, much like their Eastern counterparts. This chapter aims to consider these madwomen in relation to British colonialism and imperialism, racial and sexual politics, and their highly volatile environments; surroundings that harm one’s sense of self and psyche. Madness, then, is not a symptom exclusive to the other/the East, but it also affects Victorian women/the West. Both the psyche and the body are

traumatized; illness features as predominantly psychosomatic, desire and death are inextricably linked, and madness, at least partially, becomes an escape from the circle of oppression.

In “Empire, Race, and the Victorian Novel” Deirdre David considers the British Empire’s obsessive preoccupation with race and racial hierarchization, stressing its ample evidence in Victorian fiction. An awareness of racial others infiltrated the work of Victorian writers; whether consciously or unconsciously, the Victorian writer created characters that embodied everything alien, other, and at times, grotesque. David traces the emergence of this theme in the novel:

As British imperialism gathered steam, fuelled in part by the technological developments of the industrial revolution, empire and the related subjects of race and slavery became increasingly visible in the novel, principally for two reasons: the growing significance of Britain’s geopolitical power in the lives of ordinary Victorian people and the formal commitment of the novel to social realism (86).

Victorian writers, then, were “unconscious agents in the complex, always changing interaction between political governance and cultural practice” (89). The imperial century (1815-1902) as David specifically relays, effected the production of Victorian fiction and writers’ understanding of racial hierarchies. In the same vein, class and social hierarchies were already components of Victorian society and culture; thus, racial politics only sustained and reinforced distinct divisions between humanity.

Similarly, Patrick Brantlinger’s “Race and the Victorian Novel” examines the trope of race and the effect of racial politics in a Victorian context. He considers characters that have been marked as racially other in Victorian fiction and concludes that those characters are “far more likely to be either comic stereotypes or figures of monstrosity meant to repel rather than to evoke sympathy” (160). Brantlinger notes that the Monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is

deemed as other, and in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the “demonic characters...are often, at least, implicitly, racial others...In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff is likened to a vampire, a ghoul, and a cannibal – the last, a gothic metaphor that associates him with the ‘dark races’ of the world” (161). Thus, all characters that were considered deviant or dangerous were significantly marked as other; and the other was almost always racially inferior. Cannon Schmitt’s *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality* is also interested in establishing connections between Gothic fiction and the making of Englishness and English nationality. Schmitt finds that the Gothic genre was especially important because “in the Victorian period...the work of national definition continues to make demands upon the Gothic as Englishness becomes a defining characteristic of mid- and late-nineteenth-century culture” (10). As the British Empire came into contact with foreign or other cultures, it emphasized its superiority and Englishness.

The issue of race and gender relations is also examined by Moira Ferguson in *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid*. Ferguson historicizes the theme of gender and colonial relations, by tracing connections between gender and racial politics in texts by British writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ferguson also considers Caribbean writers and the way by which they approached the discourse of colonial relations. Ferguson’s focus is primarily on the different approaches of British and Caribbean writers. She begins her study with Mary Wollstonecraft, given that she was one of the first women writers to introduce “the thematic of colonial and gender relations in tandem...Wollstonecraft demonstrates in *The Rights of Woman* how the abolitionist movement facilitated the scrutiny of women’s rights...Wollstonecraft persistently links colonial slavery to female subjugation” (2). As Ferguson argues, Wollstonecraft pioneered the movement of female

emancipation, at least in theory. Wollstonecraft possessed the ability to recognize the interconnections between sexual and political power, “using sexuality to suggest overlappings between the oppression of white women and black women slaves” (2-3). Wollstonecraft refers to women as enslaved and “made slaves to their persons” (Wollstonecraft 96). She stresses the need for equality and asks:

Where shall we find men who will stand forth to assert the rights of man, or claim the privilege of moral beings...Slavery to monarchs and ministers, which the world will be long in freeing itself from, and whose deadly grasp stops the progress of the human mind, is not yet abolished (Wollstonecraft 48).

As such, one would infer from Wollstonecraft’s argument that she is aware that female emancipation is synonymous with freedom from racism, that sexism and racism are interdependent. She acknowledges the white male superiority and self-entitlement, by asking, “Why do they [men] expect virtue from a slave, from a being whom the constitution of civil society has rendered weak, if not vicious?” (Wollstonecraft 49). It is possible that the words “slave” and “women” are used interchangeably. Ferguson suggests that this usage of the term “slave” became more problematic and heightened with political implications after the 1770s:

The Abolition Committee...was formed on May 22, 1787, with a view to mounting a national campaign against the slave trade and securing the passage of an abolition bill through Parliament...A rapid series of events that followed continued to have a bearing on the reconstitution of the discourse on slavery (Ferguson 10-11).

As events unfolded socially and politically, Wollstonecraft became more adamant about her views on slavery and human degradation. Ferguson relates: “In *The Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft argues explicitly for the first time that no slavery is natural, and all forms of

slavery, regardless of context, are human constructions” (13). On the other hand, while Ferguson does acknowledge Wollstonecraft’s role in calling for women’s emancipation (as well as slavery’s abolition), she criticizes Wollstonecraft’s tone, reading it as too personal at times, and betraying of the cause: “She thinks of herself as positively breaking through social constraints while the vast majority of women conforms to a restrictive mandate” (21). In other words, Ferguson asserts that Wollstonecraft’s position is one of a privileged white, bourgeois feminism. Wollstonecraft, however, believed that women of the middling sort will lead the way in women’s rights, because they occupy a position that is less extreme than the upper class or the working class. Unlike Ferguson, I would argue that given the social, cultural, and political variables of the time, Wollstonecraft’s work was actually very progressive and influential, despite her privileged position.

British women writers, like Wollstonecraft, occupied a privileged position because of their race, while gender remained a hindering issue. Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers, from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* draws parallels between British women writers and examines their shared struggle against a patriarchal society and strongly male-dominated literary field. Showalter reminds us that during the Victorian period, women were considered inferior to men, and much like the other races:

There was a strong belief that the female body was in itself an inferior instrument, small, weak...Victorian physicians and anthropologists supported these ancient prejudices by arguing that women’s inferiority could be demonstrated in almost every analysis of the brain and its function. They maintained that, like the ‘lower races’, women had smaller and less efficient brains...Female intellectual distinction thus suggested not only a self-destructive imitation of a male skill but also a masculine physical development (64).

Given that the same theme of women's connection with 'racial others' also resonates in Showalter's work, it further indicates the marginal status shared by women across the globe. Victorian women writers were aware of this shared marginality and oppression, and even if a universal sisterhood was not a preoccupation of theirs, they still embarked on a writing journey which clearly sought to create strong female characters. These women writers "wanted romantic heroines, a sisterhood of shared passion and suffering, women who sobbed and struggled and rebelled. It was very difficult for the Victorians to believe that both qualities could be embodied in the same woman" (85). To create female characters that were both feminine and masculine, both passionate and reasonable, both strong and weak, necessarily demanded more than an average male character. These female characters were to embody contradicting qualities, struggle through their oppressive environments, and somehow, succeed. As such, a male double was sometimes needed to create such a character, as in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, where Catherine and Heathcliff may be read as one character, as doubles, necessarily complementing each other and representing the male/female dualism, the mind/body, and self/other.

The texts I have chosen to work with in this chapter fall under the genre of the female *Bildungsroman*. This genre has been considered by various critics as almost counter-narratives; the process of finding one's self or becoming a woman is by no means a linear or clear process of formation. Ambiguity and ambivalence are factors that this process of being/becoming relies on. For instance, Susan Fraiman's *Unbecoming Women* reconsiders the traditional male *Bildungsroman* in light of a more female-oriented novel of development. The title itself interrogates this process of becoming, focusing instead on disintegration and de-formation in Georgian and Victorian texts written between 1778 and 1860. Fraiman argues that it is necessary to reformulate different understandings of the *Bildungsroman* in order to encompass and include

different female subjectivities and experiences. To do so is to “locate...multiple narratives within a larger, cacophonous discourse about female formation” (12). There are multiple voices to be recognized, not one, singular, female voice or one site of oppression. As such, there is no unified, monolithic, sense of self either. What Fraiman claims to do is the following:

To speak...of *plural formations* is to apply the lessons of recent critical theory in two respects: first, by seeing ‘integrated’ selfhood as the clashing, patchwork of numerous social determinations, the ‘I’ as basically unstable and discontinuous; and second, by the acknowledging that formation is differentiated in terms of, say, class, country, race, and time as well as gender, so that in this sense, too, it is no longer possible to speak of a uniform fiction of female development (12-13).

The question, then, that arises, is what is this sacred self, this ‘selfhood’ that is to remain ‘stable’ and unified? How are we to arrive at a “uniform” fiction of female development/success, when there are multiple meanings embedded in all social categories and definitions? These fictions of female development are written in such a way that they call into question the stability of the self, the necessary passage and journey into maturity and success. As Fraiman reiterates, the writers, “by dramatizing female development in contradictory ways, pointed to the ‘feminine’ as a site of ideological confusion, struggle, and possibility” (31). Because any rigid category of identification was challenged, the writers were creating new definitions of the female self, the ‘feminine,’ and of course, the heroine’s successful journey to adulthood, maturity, and success (in whichever form). Fraiman claims that the writers created a new path for the *Bildungsroman*: “Unable to represent a girl’s entrance into the world as a simple, graceful passage...they managed collectively to question the routines of growing up female and male and at moments to imagine they could be otherwise” (31). Thus there was no clear, static definition of a female

Bildungsroman genre, because the issue of gender played a larger part than the tradition of the genre itself.

For the female character, there was no journey outside the home, no interaction with the public sphere, unlike her male counterpart. The female heroine struggled between her innermost desires and social repression, trying to find her own space between the two disparate spaces of private and public. There is a never-ending battle against society, as well as against the self. In “Spiritual Bildung” Marianne Hirsch maintains that this very dichotomization

propels man outside and confines woman inside, [and] defines female development in the nineteenth-century novel. Woman’s exclusively spiritual development is a death warrant, whether symbolically in the form of marriage and conformity...or literally in the form of resistance and wilful withdrawal (26)

For Hirsch, the focus of the female *Bildungsroman* is entirely spiritual and mental/emotional, centring on the heroine’s inner self and her inner development. Unlike the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the endings of the texts I have chosen culminate in either madness and/or death. This termination of the heroine’s journey is necessary for the development of the *Bildungsroman*. The journey simply ends, usually with a tragic ending. However I wish to read these ‘tragic’ endings, if you will, as not necessarily tragic. There is a pattern in nineteenth-century literature, a female *Bildungsroman* that spirals downwards, usually culminating in madness and/or death. The aim of this chapter is to read these tragic endings as successful to a certain extent, rather than as failed attempts of psychic and social reconciliation. In light of a male *Bildungsroman*, these endings may be read as unsuccessful and represent the heroine’s failed journey, because of the *Bildungsroman*’s “valorisation of progress, heterosexuality, social involvement, healthy disillusionment, ‘normality,’ adulthood” (27). As these texts celebrate the

female heroine's complex journey and create a feminine space for development, then even simple terms such as progress are questioned and redefined.

Stella Bolaki's *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* also considers the various ways by which the term *Bildungsroman* can be understood and redefined. For Bolaki, it is possible that trauma coexists with the *Bildungsroman*, without necessarily labelling the protagonist's journey as failed or counter-*Bildungsromane*. Bolaki is concerned with multiple forms of oppression in ethnic American narratives, rather than Victorian narratives of female development. Her argument will be returned to in later chapters that address postcolonial and Bedouin narratives of female development, especially in light of mother-daughter relationships, traumatized minds and bodies, and illness. For the purpose of this chapter's re-reading of my chosen texts, I argue that Bolaki's "process of revision" is necessary for "bending and stretching the form so that it reveals the multiple patterns and figures hidden under the generic 'carpet' that has served to define a largely Eurocentric and patriarchal form" (12). In my rereading of the Brontës' work, as well as Rhys's, the *Bildungsroman* must "stretch" to include other forms of oppression and a new understanding of a "successful" journey. The space for their development and progress is necessarily linked to both patriarchal and racial ideologies which start at home.

This feminine space for development is mostly limited to the domestic space, the private sphere. Female heroines were to interact with their environments mainly at home, their closest relations, the men they lived with, and negotiate their own sense of self within the framework of private and public life. In *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction*, Susan Meyer locates the metaphor of race and imperialism in Victorian women's fiction and emphasizes the reappearance of this metaphor in different texts, "linking white women with those of nonwhite races" (6). Meyer focuses on this metaphor in Victorian women's narratives

and examines the domestic space, which she argues, “evokes the literal dwelling, the lineage of the family that inhabits it...The domestic space of the home is at once an individual domicile and suggestive of the domestic space in a larger sense, the domestic space of England” (7). Confined at home, British women still dealt with subordination and oppression by white men. Meyer contends that: “The claim to European racial supremacy is based primarily on a claim to greater intellectual, spiritual, and moral capacities...The nature of European gender ideology put white women in an ambiguous position in the racial scale” (20). Because white women occupied a problematic position on both racial and gender hierarchies, they struggled to find a place amongst the two oppressive ideologies. Similarly, Meyer argues that British women writers also occupied difficult positions as writers, especially in relation to imperialist ideology. Meyer pays attention to the writers’ position in terms of gender and class, asserting that this very positioning “produced a complex and ambivalent relation to the ideology of imperialist domination...It was precisely the gender positioning of these women writers...in combination with their feminist impulses and use of race as a metaphor, that provoked and enabled [a]...questioning of British imperialism” (11). This literary questioning of British imperialism through nineteenth century literature by women is managed through the use of race as a metaphor. Meyer uses the term to cover different textual relationships and instances:

In each a white woman (x) is compared to a member or members (y) of another race, and thus the text, whether implicitly or explicitly, constructs the metaphor ‘x is y.’ Jane Eyre, for example, describes herself as a ‘rebel slave’...in a relatively straightforward metaphorical use of race...Sometimes, and most elusively, a novel simply pairs two characters, one the white female protagonist and the other a male or female character

associated with one or more nonwhite races, and I term the connection that draws between them metaphorical (20-21).

Meyer's study considers both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, drawing on the usage of race as metaphor. In the case of Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, I choose to read them as doubles, as self/other, and like Meyer, I see their pairing as necessary for the race metaphor. Unlike Meyer, I also see their pairing as necessary for a gender metaphor, a way by which Brontë shows the instability and fluidity of gender binaries.

The two Victorian texts and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* deal with passion, illness, and madness, against the backdrop of racial and sexual oppression. The heroines of *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* all become ill, either mentally and/or physically, and as such, become labelled 'invalid' women as Diane Herndl employs the term in *Invalid Women*. Herndl's study centres on American fiction and culture during the mid- and late nineteenth century. However her research is indispensable to my reading of the figure of the 'madwoman' in the texts I have chosen, specifically her definition of the 'invalid' woman. The main question that Herndl raises is how effective is the invalid woman's plight, and does she retain any power, or is she utterly powerless in the face of patriarchal oppression and negative connotations of femininity? Herndl emphasizes the dual connotations of the 'invalid' woman in literature:

The figure of the invalid woman insists on a reading that focuses on the play of power and desire in the narrative, the family, and the culture. The woman who becomes sick is portrayed as a figure with no power, subject to the whims of her body or mind, or a figure with enormous power, able to achieve her desires through the threat of her imminent death or her disability (4).

I read the figure of the ‘madwoman’ or the ‘invalid’ woman as a powerful figure, able to threaten society’s sanctions of normativity, sanity, and purity. The madwoman and/or the invalid woman gains power in all three texts, even when death enters the picture, and her story ends tragically. The plot is continuously spiralling downwards; it is non-linear, non-progressive, and resistant to heteronormative and racial ideologies. Herndl insists that it is “patriarchal culture [that is] potentially sickening for women and...defining women as inherently sick, especially when they resist its norms” (7). Protagonists are affected by their environments and in turn, *react* to their circumstances, and it is this action/reaction, that is marked as dangerous and threatening. For the protagonist, the distinction between the private and the public space rests on domesticity and domestic ideology. As Herndl puts it:

Domesticity not only separates the world into two spheres –the private and the public – and restricts women to just one but questions whether women can ever really prosper in their private sphere...women may have to wait for heaven to receive their reward, domesticity forces yet another division into ‘this world’ and ‘the other world’ (47).

Domesticity, like other oppressive ideologies, including race, class, and gender distinctions, further sets women apart from their male counterparts, and provides little room for social or political emancipation. As Herndl points out, women were to be rewarded in a different, other life, and it is this very dualistic thought that added to their inferiority and powerlessness.

However domesticity also managed to have women believe in their claim to the private space, to the idea of the home being theirs, and otherworldliness being theirs as a reward. There are obvious contradictions and manifestations of domesticity, just like the invalid’s actions may be seen as paradoxical: “Such contradictions could have themselves encouraged a retreat into ‘illness’, where all these virtues could appear to be resolved: the invalid is naturally dependent,

so any act of self-determination, however small, seems an act of independence” (49). As such, even the formulation of the figure of the madwoman and/or the invalid necessarily constituted an examination of contradictory forces and ambiguous positions. She is neither fully passive nor an entirely successful active agent.

In *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction*, Jane Wood argues that Victorian novelists were very much engaged with medical writings and medical discourse. She finds that literature and medicine were informed by each other, and as such, “nervous disorder was a dominant category of Victorian disease narratives” (3). Wood raises the question of identity and a coherently defined sense of self, what happened to that selfhood in relation to illness and “alienating nervous conditions” (5). The female sense of self was under intense medical and social scrutiny. Hysteria always loomed in the corner, always threatened to absorb and obliterate the self. Hysteria itself was represented and redefined in numerous ways, “appropriating ideas and images from a whole range of often contradictory knowledges...the term ‘hysteria’ served both to encompass and mask the bewildering diversity of definitions and explanations” (12-13). The hysterical body then, encompassed both the mind’s transgressions and the body’s. Wood asserts that there was a common belief that the body carried within it its mental state, it was the vessel, and as such, psychosomatic illness included an understanding “of the nervous system as the mediating mechanism between mind and body” (14). Emotional and mental distress was inscribed on the body, and it is this manifestation of illness which seems uncontrollable and unwilled by the heroine. Moreover it was this very idea of the female will that was negotiable. According to Victorian neurologists and physicians, women either had too strong a ‘will’ or was inherently weak. Wood examines the ambiguity of the term ‘will’ in relation to the Victorian understanding of women’s will:

All attempts to define the difference between ‘will’ meaning volition and ‘will’ meaning wilfulness collapsed in transparent wordplay or blatant prejudice. Throughout the first half of the century, the notion of woman’s weak will, evidenced in her emotional, intuitive, and impulsive nature, existed simultaneously with a suspicion that some women had too strong a will. The spectre of the strong-willed, self-assertive woman offended the preferred image of Victorian womanhood (45).

As such, women were defined in constricting terms of either being too weak or too strong, too good or too bad, too passive or too dangerous. What the texts I have chosen to work with do, is examine these protagonists in light of their willpower, presenting them as subjects that are either cast as weak or powerful; both ways judged as inferior.

A counterargument to women’s supposed inferiority is articulated by Nancy Armstrong, in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. She examines the rise of the domestic novel and female power and authority in fictional narratives. Armstrong is specifically interested in sexual relations between male and female characters and the ideologies of power that constituted this interaction. Also, she identifies the importance of subjectivities in constituting knowledge and power: “Writing that constituted the self as such an object of knowledge was a primary agent of history” (191). Armstrong sees British women writers as agents of history and culture, but even more notably, agents of the politics of desire. She claims the following:

If one gives credence to the notion of a history of subjectivity and to the priority of writing in constituting subjectivity as an object of knowledge, then it is a relatively simple step to see the Brontës as agents of history. We can assume their fiction produced – and continues with each act of interpretation to produce – figures of modern

desire...The Brontës indeed saw their work as a reaction against the tradition of domestic fiction exemplified by Jane Austen (191).

The Brontës constructed female characters who had a voice, power, and resisted patriarchy and used desire as a form of socio-political revolt. Armstrong maintains that *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* use these female subjectivities to “reconstitute the individual as a particular field of knowledge” and relays two examples from the texts:

The intrusion of Catherine’s ghost into Lockwood’s dream serves the same purpose as the disclosure of Rochester’s mad wife in *Jane Eyre*. This rupture confuses genders and generations, calling into question what is inside as opposed to outside the individual...in the process of handing over such powers of motivation to the female, fiction does something to history...It is a tale told by a woman. It is a history of sexuality (196-7).

Thus similarly to Armstrong, I read Catherine and Bertha as powerful female characters, with the potential to break repressive Victorian ideologies. Both texts offer subjectivities that provide us with knowledge of social and power relations between men and women, between self/other, and racial relations with the other.

Insofar as racial politics are concerned, Athena Vrettos’s *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* provides an exemplary study of the way the Victorians constructed the mind and the body, health and illness ideologies and images, relying heavily on dichotomization of man/woman, mind/body, self/other. In the chapter on “National Health: Defining Bodily Boundaries” Vretto asserts that the English/Victorian body became a symbol of all that is Victorian and ‘pure’; and as such superior to other races and/or lower classes. Maintaining a healthy, clean, and proper body represented an ideal Victorian racial, social, and cultural identity. Vretto explains: “The somatic fictions through which the individual body

became a measure of national identity and imperialist power were, at least in part, produced by literature that emphasized ideals of health, fitness, and empire, both at home and abroad” (134). Health was associated with the empire, while disease, illness, and disability was linked to the racially or sexually other. Disease, then, “connoted a threat to corporeal borderlands –an impediment to both imperial domination and evolutionary progress” (154). In the same vein, women who fell ill or went ‘mad’ were considered dangerously other and a threat to the social order.

Wuthering Heights: Catherine’s Madness

In both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* (published in the same year (1847) and written by sisters living together) sexual power relations, class difference, and gender difference intersect with imperialist and racial ideologies. Victorian discourse of racial difference resonates with class and gender difference, and I do not wish to focus only on one discourse, because to do that would be to dismiss the multiple ideologies at work and risk [and] oversimplification of the ‘madwoman’ figure in the texts. The first novel I examine is Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, and I focus specifically on Catherine’s madness, physical illness, and subsequent death, along with Heathcliff’s presence in her life as the unattainable love. *Wuthering Heights* is of course one of the most canonical works of English literature and there is a plethora of critical and scholarly work that has been done on Brontë’s text. The research has been extensive, and this chapter will instead attempt to focus on a couple of angles, rather than cover all possible rich readings of the text. By no means does my reading of Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship exclude class and gender relations, but I am more interested in the idea of self/other in *Wuthering Heights* and the obliteration of this ‘other.’ Catherine must negotiate a place for herself within the public/private spheres that dictate and control her self-expression of her innermost desires, her sense of self,

and her place between both spaces. The transgressive relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is the centre of this chapter's examination of the text. In the same vein, this relationship epitomizes Victorian ideologies of race, class, and gender and the obliteration of the 'other.'

To summarize the text would be to ignore its multiple narrative voices, its tensions, its gaps and inconsistencies, and its heightened rage, its rage that seeps through the setting and the characters. In *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith provide a brief synopsis of the novel, insisting that the novel's shifting narrative viewpoints add to its depth. Both Nelly Dean (the housekeeper) and Mr. Lockwood, the new tenant of Thrushcross Grange, attempt to tell the story of two generations of the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, the Earnshaws and the Lintons:

One day in 1771...Mr. Earnshaw returns from Liverpool with a black-haired orphan...whom he called Heathcliff after a son who died...When Mr. Earnshaw dies, Hindley returns from college...and Heathcliff is relegated to the status of a farm-labourer...Cathy is bitten by a guard dog...and spends five weeks at the Grange...Three years later, Cathy marries Edgar Linton...The peaceful existence at the Grange is shattered by the sudden return of Heathcliff, who having acquired an imposing stature, education, and wealth by mysterious means, now seeks vengeance...He encourages Isabella Linton's infatuation for him and elopes with her...Cathy dies giving birth to a girl, another Catherine. During the next twelve years Catherine grows up beautiful but spoilt...Heathcliff claims his sickly petulant son Linton, planning to marry him to Catherine before he dies...Heathcliff is now the possessor of both Thrushcross Grange

and *Wuthering Heights*, but his satisfaction is abated by his obsession with Cathy's ghost (559-60).

The young Catherine and Hindley's son, Hareton, fall in love and "are to be married and to move to the Grange, where life promises this younger generation a happiness denied to the earlier lovers. Heathcliff...dies mysteriously in her [Catherine's] bed one night" (560). This detailed summary still excludes many events of the narrative and I have narrowed it down to the most significant events for this chapter's discussion. This chapter is concerned mainly with the first generation, Catherine and Heathcliff, along with Edgar and Isabella Linton, as well as Hindley Earnshaw. Primarily, I choose to focus on the two lovers' transgressive relationship and its effects on a social, racial, and ideological level. Catherine and Heathcliff are both 'othered' and rejected from 'proper' society. They are both abjected, excluded, and deemed dangerous and immoral. Catherine relays her dream to Nelly, in which she is casted out of heaven, seemingly by choice: "heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of *Wuthering Heights*; where I woke sobbing for joy" (80). Catherine, at least in her most unconscious desires, chooses to be expelled and abjected out of 'heaven' and all that is deemed part of the social and natural order; she finds that being a fallen woman, suspended from heaven, is better than being accepted into heaven and/or society. Heaven here denotes a multitude of social, religious, and moral ideologies that the text attempts to dismantle. Catherine's dream recapitulates her entire conflict within herself and with the public domain. Unhappy with this version of heaven, of the premises of 'goodness' and grace, Catherine instead willingly chooses to exorcise herself from the social order and embraces 'hell', illness, and madness. Her rejection of heaven writes itself onto her mind and body, until she manages to escape the confinement of

heaven, society, religion, and domesticity. The space she creates for herself, which embraces ‘illness’ and ‘madness’ is a space that also threatens society; a space that would not ‘normally’ be viewed as the better option in the strict divisions and dichotomizations of society. After a series of choices which include marrying Edgar, rather than her ‘darker’ half (Heathcliff), and after satisfying society’s demands, Catherine eventually reverts to her wild, ‘dangerous’ side and chooses ‘hell.’

The novel’s setting, *Wuthering Heights*, is a place like no other. Perhaps Gilbert and Gubar’s description in *The Madwoman in the Attic* is most apt: “The world of *Wuthering Heights*...is one where what seems to be the most unlikely opposites coexist, without, apparently, any consciousness on the author’s part that there is anything unlikely in their coexistence” (260). “Hell is a household very much like *Wuthering Heights*” (260). Brontë creates a world filled with polar opposites, with binary oppositions and dichotomies –everything threatens the ‘other’ and there is always the threat of a breakdown, of destruction, and of hell rising. In “The Wuther of the Other in *Wuthering Heights*” Steven Vine describes the setting as the following:

Wuthering Heights is a house under stress; its very stability is the result of a climatic "tumult" that means its windows are sunk, desperately and defensively, deep into its walls, and its clean corners are broken up by obtruding stones. If the house is less slanted, stunted, and stretched than the firs and thorns that gather round it, its strange grotesqueries – disappearing windows, jutting walls – nevertheless betray the turbulence that conditions it. *Wuthering Heights* is skewed by extremity: it is an architectural torsion wuthering between stability and instability (339-40).

Vine argues that the house ‘wuthers’ both on the inside and the outside, blurring the distinctions between both. The house is unstable, shaky, and is attacking itself from the inside out, rather than being attacked from an external force. This instability witnessed in the setting of the novel, reveals a “trembling between internality and externality, [and] wuthering becomes a movement of othering: a passing of boundaries that takes the outside in and the inside out” (340). The physical setting is extended onto the two central characters of the text. Both Catherine and Heathcliff are outsiders: “Cathy finds in the powerless Heathcliff a figure of her own dispossession. As an outsider, Heathcliff metaphorizes Cathy's otherness to the patriarchal world of the Heights – and Cathy “is” Heathcliff insofar as he images her own eccentricity to that world” (345). As Vine argues, the mutual inferiority shared by both characters enables them to cut across gender and ‘race’ boundaries in order to figure as one: this is the ‘doubleness’ I discussed earlier. Upon her separation from her ‘double’ (Heathcliff) her sense of self begins to deteriorate as does her mental and physical health. It is not merely separation from the love object that drives Catherine mad but, on the contrary, it is the ‘wuthering’ of her own sense of self by external forces that include patriarchal oppression and domesticity. Vine states:

Cathy's self is defined from the start as a movement of othering in which she is eccentric both to the patriarchal structures of Wuthering Heights and to the conjugal gentility of Thrushcross Grange...she is constrained by and in excess of the filial and marital identities that are assigned to her (347).

Catherine’s self-annihilation and eventual descent into madness and subsequent death epitomize the ‘wuthering’ of her identity and self-image; even after her death, she returns as a ghost, constantly haunting Heathcliff, a troubled spirit who identifies as Catherine Linton, Catherine Earnshaw, and Catherine Heathcliff (Brontë 18). Heathcliff, like Catherine, undergoes emotional

and nearly pathological sufferings, ‘wuthering’ away, always as the ‘other’, even when in a position of power; he is still the ‘other’, the unknown, and the feared. Deidre David explains in “Empire, Race, and the Victorian Novel” that: “Any discussion of imperial invasion of domestic space must inevitably cope with Heathcliff – that dark, vengeful figure found wandering on the streets of the slave-trading port of Liverpool by his saviour, Mr. Earnshaw...Heathcliff’s darkness, the mystery of his origins, his savage, even racially stereotyped behaviour make him a symbol of the colonised, the racially oppressed” (93). As such, Heathcliff is always the ‘other’ and represents the racially oppressed, even though his position as a man is more powerful than Catherine’s. Heathcliff, too, ‘wuthers’ and is emotionally and mentally damaged throughout the text. When Heathcliff begins to lose Catherine to her newly acclaimed lady-like personality (after she spends weeks at the Grange) he begins suffering, and we are told that his “personal appearance sympathized with mental deterioration: he acquired a slouching gate, and ignoble look; his naturally reserved disposition was exaggerated into an almost idiotic excess of unsociable moroseness” (Brontë 67). As Catherine tries to adapt to an oppressive Victorian ideology of domesticity, Heathcliff’s character, mental and physical state, mirrors Catherine’s internal struggle to ‘tame’ herself. In *Sexual Personae*, Camille Paglia accentuates the mutual identification between Catherine and Heathcliff:

The resemblances between Heathcliff and Catherine are literal. She is as violent and vengeful as he...she is always attacking people and knocking them about. Catherine and Heathcliff suffer emotion as physical paroxysms. Both grind their teeth in fits of temper and dash their heads against hard objects...This love affair is Emily Brontë’s romantic coalescence of the doubles (446).

Both Catherine and Heathcliff exhibit raw passion, untamed, uncivil behaviour, which eventually leads one of them to her death, and the other, Heathcliff, to a mental and emotional obsession with her ghost. After Catherine's death, Heathcliff begins to exhibit his own raving 'madness' and becomes obsessed with the idea of Catherine's ghost coming back to haunt him. Nelly narrates Heathcliff's grief, and links it to savagery and animalism rather than love and humanity: "He dashed his head against the knotted trunk...and howled, not like a man, but like a beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears...It hardly moved my compassion –it appalled me" (Brontë 170). The narrator's voice carries negative connotations, as always, of Heathcliff's savagery. Patrick Brantlinger, in "Race and the Victorian Novel", emphasizes the inextricable connections between race and class in *Wuthering Heights* by considering Heathcliff's unknown origins: "In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, similar analogies between gender, race, and social class domination are evident in the story of the 'gypsy' Heathcliff, whose unclear but 'dark' racial identity is linked both to his untameable passions and to the slavery-like oppression he experiences after the death of Mr. Earnshaw, who rescued him from the slums of Liverpool" (160). Heathcliff, then, represents any unknown race or class, anything and anyone that is foreign, different and threatening to an English, white, supremacist society. Even his mourning of Catherine is described by Nelly as ferocious and dangerous, in contrast to Edgar Linton's "exhausted anguish" which Nelly asserts is an "image of Divine rest" (Brontë 167). Heathcliff embodies the White Man's every nightmare – the dark and savage behaviour which the White Man must distance himself from.

Susan Meyer's chapter on "Reverse Imperialism in *Wuthering Heights*" reads Brontë's text as more preoccupied with imperialist and colonial ideologies than gender ideologies and oppression. Meyer recognizes that Heathcliff is not merely representative of the lower working

class, but instead, is representative of all ‘other’ ‘dark races.’ For Meyer, Emily Brontë “makes an extended critique of British imperialism. She does so in part by exploring what would happen if the suppressed power of the ‘savage’ outsiders were unleashed” (100-01). She claims that Brontë’s creation of Heathcliff as Catherine’s lover and the person with whom she most identifies with, is essential for reading gender and race as simultaneously oppressive ideological regimes. Yet Catherine becomes mentally and physically ill, and dies, while Heathcliff lives on and grows more powerful. Meyer insists that the novel attempts to critique the social order:

This novel...persists through its ending in affirming transgression against British social structures. In doing so, *Wuthering Heights* also suggests the ways in which traditional moves of fictional closure act to suppress energies of social resistance (103).

Perhaps the biggest transgression takes place after Heathcliff embodies the ‘other’s’ power and becomes more of a threat to the social order than when Catherine was alive. A metaphorical bond, dependent on love and mutual identification as its root, suddenly becomes a larger, more socio-political threat. Meyer argues: “Emily Brontë...unleashes Heathcliff’s energies of social resistance, and that resistance takes the form of the worst nightmare of the imperialist power: reverse colonization...Heathcliff takes this revenge on an oppressive British society” (112).

Heathcliff takes over both the Heights and the Grange and oppresses the younger generations. The oppressive cycle repeats itself, where the victim becomes the aggressor.

Catherine’s physical illness and subsequent madness is necessary for the narrative’s development and her *Bildungsroman* journey. Like all the mad female heroines in this project, Catherine’s mind and body are sites of resistance. In ‘It Has Devoured My Existence: The Power of the Will and Illness in *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *Wuthering Heights*,’ Lakshmi Krishnan argues that both Catherine and Heathcliff have power over their own minds and bodies, and that

specifically, Catherine's illness and descent into madness and death, is not a loss of power, but rather an assertion of her will to write her own ending. Krishnan also analyses the first episode of illness, in which Catherine first becomes vulnerable and susceptible to illness:

The primordial illness of the novel, the origin and prototype of the others, occurs, not when Cathy is taken ill at Thrushcross Grange, but when Heathcliff runs away from the Heights. Cathy waits for him in the storm, and subsequently contracts what Kenneth, the country surgeon, pronounces to be 'fever' (*WH*, p. 69). This episode represents Catherine's first encounter with the condition that eventually causes her death; additionally, it initiates the trope of brain fever (34).

Catherine's initial separation from Heathcliff, then, and her awareness of her torn self, her decision to marry Edgar Linton, her desire to stay 'wild', and her conflicting emotions write themselves on her body and mind. Her emotional and mental trauma manifests on both a psychic and corporeal level. Catherine's traumas are the result of her inability to be confined to a strictly feminine, domestic role, even as a child. Nelly's description of Cathy as a child is perhaps most apt:

Certainly she had ways with her such as I never saw a child take up before... Her spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going – singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same... She was much too fond of Heathcliff. The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him... She was defying us with her bold, saucy look, and her ready words; turning Joseph's religious curses into ridicule, baiting me, and doing just what her father hated most (40-41)

As a child, she is untameable, difficult to control, does not behave according to familial expectations, and even challenges her father's authority. When he asks her why she cannot "always be a good lass, Cathy?" she retaliates and asks her father why he can't be a "good man, father?" (42). Patriarchal authority does not threaten the young Cathy and she does not easily accept gender divisions or subscribe to gender roles. When Mr. Earnshaw heads to Liverpool for a journey, Catherine famously chooses a whip: "she was hardly six years old...and she chose a whip" (35). In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar link the 'whip' to Heathcliff, "she gets it figuratively – in the form of a 'gypsy brat' – rather than literally, but nevertheless 'it' (both whip and brat) functions just as she must unconsciously have hoped it would...so as to insulate her from the pressure of her brother's domination" (264). Upon receiving her 'whip' and being able to gain access to her 'stronger' self, Catherine gains the power she needs in the face of a sexist and patriarchal culture. However, because Heathcliff is of unknown origins, her 'whip' is not as powerful as she would have hoped for, and is easily broken by the brother, Hindley, who represents British white supremacist society. As such, when Catherine realizes this, and attempts to behave as a 'proper' lady, she must tame her 'wild' nature. Nelly describes her as having adopted a "double character without exactly intending to deceive anyone. In the place where she heard Heathcliff termed a 'vulgar young ruffian'...she took care not to act like him: but at home she had small inclination to practice politeness...and restrain an unruly nature" (65-66).

Catherine develops a sort of identity split in order to accommodate her internal desires and society's expectations; the private and public spheres solicit different selves of hers, as does the binary of nature/culture. She is always negotiating a space between two polar opposites, between two seemingly disparate categories, and as a result, she also is faced with the question of being

Catherine-Heathcliff or Catherine Linton. Undoubtedly, Heathcliff represents her unconscious desires, and nature, while Linton symbolizes British oppressive culture and society.

Upon entering the social order and being forced out of her personal space, Catherine's sense of self begins to deteriorate. When Catherine gets bitten by the dog at Thrushcross Grange, this is the turning point in the text. This is Catherine's initiation into the social order, the adult world, the world which rejects Heathcliff, culture which rejects nature, white men who reject the 'other.' As Heathcliff puts it, describing the dog that bit Catherine: "The devil had seized her" (47). We are informed that "Cathy stayed at Thrushcross Grange five weeks: till Christmas. By that time her ankle was thoroughly cured, and her manners much improved" and "displaying fingers wonderfully whitened with doing nothing and staying indoors" (50, 51). Class and race difference are suddenly highlighted between the two lovers. She is unlike Heathcliff whose "face and hands was dismally beclouded" and her own hair also, must be "combed...out of curl" (51, 68), distancing her from any 'wild' or untamed physical appearance, so that she is nothing like the 'other' and is only purely English in appearance, thought, and behaviour. Victorian bourgeois ideology entailed her dress code, her behaviour, her hairstyle – the control of the female body as well as the inner psyche remains evident throughout.

Catherine's relationship with Heathcliff is not only transgressive, but also, it provides her with a sense of power. When Catherine loses Heathcliff, she also loses power and her psyche is severely traumatized. Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* considers the melancholic, the depressed subject, and the subject's interactions with the outer world. According to Kristeva, the melancholic female gains "phallic power" and authority through her transgressive bouts of melancholia/madness. Precisely, there is a loss that takes place, a loss that

threatens the subject's sense of self, wholeness, and manifests similarly to "female castration" (81). Kristeva's argument is as follows:

Loss of the erotic object (unfaithfulness or desertion by the lover or husband, divorce, etc.) is felt by the woman as an assault on her genitality and, from that point of view, amounts to castration. At once, such a castration starts resonating with the threat of destruction of the body's integrity, the body image, and the entire psychic system as well...*As if her phallus were her psyche*, the loss of the erotic object breaks up and threatens to empty her whole psychic life (81-2).

Catherine, then, loses her "whip", her power, Heathcliff, and her psyche disintegrates. By losing her double, her male counterpart, and her rebellious self, she is severed from herself, and her mind deteriorates. A split happens once Catherine's sense of self is threatened, and she barely recognizes herself anymore. For example, she does not recognize her own self in the mirror, and that is perhaps the most apt example from the text which exemplifies the split of her psyche from her body, as well as her two selves. Nelly's attempt to hold her back from the trauma of seeing herself in the mirror proves futile:

And say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own...

'It's behind there still!' she pursued, anxiously. 'And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!' (124-25).

Catherine has literally split from herself and is not able to recognize herself; she finds no security or safety anywhere, and yet cannot stand to be alone. Her physical image is no longer recognizable to her, and her mental/emotional security in knowing herself is non-existent. She has separated from any version of herself.

The annihilation and alienation Catherine feels is symptomatic of melancholia and the psychosomatic illness that seizes her. The doctor, Kenneth, diagnoses her case as “permanent alienation of intellect” (133). Catherine initially begins her mental and emotional battle with her external surroundings by first refusing to eat, and grows physically weaker. Catherine chooses to starve herself, after deliberately weighing her options: “I’ll choose between these two; either to starve at once – that would be no punishment unless he (Linton) had a heart – or to recover, and leave the country” (122). The way by which Catherine’s choice is described is also accentuated by her pregnancy. Catherine is pregnant during her bout of self-starvation and madness. As Gilbert and Gubar put it, “an impulse toward self-starvation would seem to be an equally obvious response to the pregnant woman’s inevitable fear of being monstrously inhabited, as well as to her own horror of being enslaved to the species and reduced to a tool of the life process” (286). Catherine’s pregnancy is unwarranted to her, unwanted, and there is reason to believe that she deliberately wanted to rid herself of the unborn fetus. Gilbert and Gubar shed light on this argument: “If the child has been fathered...by a man the woman defines as a stranger, her desire to rid herself of it seems reasonable enough. But what if she must kill herself in the process?...must motherhood, like ladyhood, kill? Is female sexuality necessarily deadly?” (286).

The answer to Gilbert and Gubar’s question is that in the texts I have chosen, forced marriage (and motherhood) is in fact deadly, and madness emerges both as a solution and a resolution to this aspect of female oppression. In Catherine’s case, it is also a resolution. When she dies in Heathcliff’s arms, Brontë tells us that she clings to him: “she clung fast, gasping: there was *mad resolution* in her face” (165, *my italics*). Catherine, at least subconsciously, resolves to go mad, to die, to end her life, although she does consciously question what is happening to her mental and physical state of being. Catherine is aware of her descent into

madness; it is a wilful descent. It is not only Nelly who is able to discern Catherine's disassociation from herself, but more significantly, Catherine maintains some amount of logic and reason in order to diagnose her own condition. Catherine describes her own internal struggle: "I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free...and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of a tumult at a few words?" (127). She is aware of the change that is happening to her mind and body and the transformation that has robbed her of her freedom – 'ladyhood and motherhood' as Gilbert and Gubar label it, and she wishes she were a "girl" again, free from the weight and burden of society's expectations.

Catherine's mental annihilation precedes her physical deterioration and eventual death.

Nelly expresses Catherine's mental and emotional state as follows:

The flash of her eyes had been succeeded by a dreamy and melancholy softness, they no longer gave the impression of looking at the objects around her: they appeared always to gaze beyond...you would have said out of this world. Then, the paleness of her face...and the peculiar expression arising from her mental state...stamped her as one doomed to decay (158).

Melancholia presents itself as the initial symptom of Catherine's illness. Her detachment from 'objects' around her and her physical symptoms are secondary; they are a result of her pregnancy, self-starvation, and her mental/emotional state. Her melancholic state writes itself onto her body, causing her to grow weaker. Catherine spends two months mentally and physically ill, until her last meeting with Heathcliff, when he accuses her of killing herself: "You have killed yourself...misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it" (163). Heathcliff is at least partially

right about Catherine's strong will. Her response is to admit that if she "has done wrong, I'm dying for it" (162). Catherine's death, however, is not a punishment of herself, but rather, it is a form of salvation of herself, while leaving Heathcliff and Edgar to suffer. She departs from the hierarchical society and world that separated her from Heathcliff and united her with Edgar. Catherine's exit from society and/or life is as dramatic as her forceful pairing with Edgar. It is a transgression that she must act out, an act that she must fulfil, having buried her "savage and hardy" self long ago (127). Catherine's emotional death takes place very early on in the text, while her mental and physical (literal) deaths take place later on.

Jane Eyre: The Invalidity of Bertha Mason

For the purpose of this chapter, I choose to focus specifically on the sexual politics between Jane and Mr. Rochester, the class consciousness which oppresses Jane on different levels, the preoccupation of the text with sanity/insanity, and Jane's encounter with the mad Bertha Mason. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* should be read with a critical eye that acknowledges the racial politics at hand and Antoinette/Bertha's role in helping Jane assert a certain feminism. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism":

In this fictive England, she [Antoinette/Bertha] must play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer (270).

The Victorian woman asserts a certain feminism, but it happens at the expense of the 'other/othered' woman. Like *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* is concerned with overt class and gender ideologies, while a deeper, imperialist and racist ideology remains embedded within the text.

Jane's journey has been identified as a female *Bildungsroman* by many critics, especially since it starts with Jane the ten-year old child. Jane's story, however, is intrinsically tied to Bertha Mason, who has been read as her double. Leading feminist critics such as Gilbert and Gubar have argued for this resemblances and similarities between Jane and Bertha, while Postcolonialists such as Spivak have read Jane and Bertha as empire-specific characters, as self/other, West/East, locked in a destructive doubling. The debate remains as divided as any model of dichotomous thought, always separating, always differentiating, rather than finding common grounds and a more encompassing, inclusive space. I read the gender and class oppression that Jane suffers from as almost equal to the racial othering and patriarchal oppression that Bertha suffers from. It is not synonymous, as racial and sexual politics are not interchangeable terms, but rather similar, resting on the same terrain of oppression. Jane is the privileged other, but only insofar as her 'whiteness' saves her from further female degradation of the mind and body. This by no means obliterates her experience under a Victorian patriarchal culture which sought to annihilate any sense of female identity. Jane and Bertha have different endings: the first integrates herself into proper Victorian society, while the latter rejects the very same society and ends up 'mad' and eventually, dead. Critics have read Jane's ending as successful, and Bertha's as tragic. This section of the chapter argues for a deconstruction of this dominant understanding of the two disparate characters, and a new reading that entails Bertha's success, rather than Jane's. Jane is married eventually to the disabled Rochester, rather than the

previously ‘able-d’ Rochester. He comes to Jane, rehumanized, after Bertha has done the deed of burning down the house. The burning of the house and disabling of Rochester (by Bertha) allows room for a new, more ‘equal’ relationship with the other. Rochester’s othering brings him closer to the female other (Jane); and this is only done by the doubly-othered Bertha.

For a typical female *Bildungsroman*, the heroine must happily marry and, somehow, find maturation and independence. Karen Rowe argues in “Fairy-born and Human-bred” that, “it is not education in a formal sense that facilitates Jane’s growth and maturation, but rather the confrontation with male sexuality...that will metamorphose her from a plain, lowly Jane into a beautiful lady of the manor” (70). The heroine must successfully reconcile the tensions between male and female, between solitude and companionship, and finally, she must be able to culminate the relationship with her lover in marriage. In *Sexual Personae* Camille Paglia emphasizes the difference between Emily Brontë’s and Charlotte Brontë’s work:

Despite sex-reversing moments, Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre* is a social novel governed by public principles of intelligibility. It records the worldly progress of an ingénue from childhood to maturity, culminating in marriage. Emily’s *Wuthering Heights*, on the other hand, is High Romantic, its sources of energy outside society and its sex and emotion incestuous and solipsistic. The two Brontë novels differ dramatically in their crossing lines of identification. Charlotte palpably projects herself into her underprivileged but finally triumphant heroine, while Emily leaps across the borderline of gender into her savage hero (445).

Jane’s transformation from an orphaned child into a supposedly independent woman (at least financially) meets the criteria for a traditional female *Bildungsroman*. The “maturity” Jane reaches is only established once she marries Rochester. This ending of the novel has been

traditionally viewed as Jane's 'happy' ending. For Jane to reach this "maturity", she must be able to grow emotionally and more importantly, mentally. Like the majority of critics' readings of the text in the 1980s, Elaine Showalter considers Jane's ending a successful, triumphant one.

Showalter, in *A Literature of their Own: British Women Writers, from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* comments on the psychological aspect in *Jane Eyre*:

Brontë's most profound innovation, however, is the division of the Victorian female psyche into its extreme components of mind and body, which she externalizes as two characters, Helen Burns and Bertha Mason. Both Helen and Bertha function at realistic levels in the narrative and present implied and explicit connections to Victorian sexual ideology... Brontë gives us not one but three faces of Jane, and she resolves her heroine's psychic dilemma by literally and metaphorically destroying the two polar personalities to make way for the full strength and development of the central consciousness, for the integration of the spirit and the body (93).

Showalter's argument, then, recognizes Bertha only as a symbol for the body and not as a split, separate subject. Her reading of Bertha is not concerned with Bertha herself, but instead, Jane, and Jane's successful "integration of the spirit and the body"; her sense of completeness and wholeness. Like most early feminist critics, Showalter's reading places Bertha in the background, while Jane takes centre stage and is deemed as the successful heroine. Gilbert and Gubar consider Bertha's appearance in the novel an "intrusion" in Jane's life and her relationship with Rochester –rather than the other way around – for it is Jane who intrudes into Thornfield, and takes Rochester from his 'first' wife. Spivak insists that Bertha is not simply Jane's dark double, and a very reductionist reading that ignores imperialism renders Bertha invisible. Like Spivak, I read Jane's success and established selfhood as the result of Bertha's death, and it is

only at the cost of Bertha's death that Jane is able to emerge as the strong subject that critics have read her as.

In *Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre: A Casebook*, Elsie Michie stresses the plethora of criticism that has emerged since the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847. She argues that the novel "had been perceived as making a radical argument about the position of women since it was first published" (15). Michie recognizes that in the 1980s and 1990s, the reception of *Jane Eyre* shifted to an analysis of race and empire:

This school of criticism was set in motion, at least in part, by Gayatri Spivak's well-known 1985 essay 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,' which argues that Jane's triumphant emergence as a subject controlling her own destiny is only possible after the annihilation of her colonial other, Bertha Mason (17).

Spivak's essay marked the beginning of a new wave of critical readings of the text. Following Spivak's lead, Jenny Sharpe's "Allegories of Empire" argues that Bertha is considered the Other that must be destroyed in order for Jane/the Englishwoman to emerge successfully. Sharpe sheds light on the depiction of Bertha as the dark and monstrous Other: "Bertha... is a Calibanesque figure—a cannibalistic beast who chews her brother's flesh to the bone, a fiend who spews forth obscenities, and a monster who cannot control her sexual appetites" (86-7). Sharpe also examines the parallels between Jane and Bertha in terms of sanity/insanity: "Jane often refers to her own state of mind, when consumed by her love for Rochester, as a condition of madness. Yet it is her superior intellect... that separates her own excess from Bertha's" (88). It is the "assertion of racial superiority discursively [that] resolves Jane's class and gender inferiority in relationship to Rochester" (91). As such, it is Jane's identification as an Englishwoman that saves her from what could have been her fate, a fate like Bertha's.

Other Postcolonial critics such as Joyce Zonana have teased out the underlying racism and imperialist ideologies in *Jane Eyre*. Zonana identifies Rochester with an Eastern allusion to a Sultan. Her essay, “The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of *Jane Eyre*”, examines the resemblances between Rochester and a Sultan, arguing that by blaming Rochester’s bigamy on Eastern characteristics, Western readers and the Western psyche are able to detach themselves from such a character. Zonana argues:

Part of a large system of what I term feminist orientalist discourse that permeates *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë’s sultan/slave simile displaces the source of patriarchal oppression onto an ‘Oriental’, ‘Mahometan’ society, enabling British readers to contemplate local problems without questioning their own self-definition as Westerners and Christians (169).

I consider this attempt at distancing the Western audience from Rochester a failed one, for it is Victorian culture in itself that promotes gender and class oppression. For Brontë, it may have been more of a subtle critique to employ Eastern allusions and relate Rochester to a Sultan. For instance, at a certain point in the text, Rochester clearly objectifies Jane, referring to her as “little English girl”:

He chuckled, he subbed his hands: ‘Oh, it is rich to see and hear her!’ he exclaimed. ‘Is she original? Is she piquant? I would not exchange this one little English girl for the grand Turk’s whole seraglio; gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all!’

The Eastern allusion bit me again. ‘I’ll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio,’ I said, ‘so don’t consider me an equivalent for one; if you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul without delay; and

lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here.’ (Brontë 229)

Jane’s reaction is defensive, and she is only offended by the “Eastern allusion” rather than being described as a “little English girl.” For it is not gender or class oppression that bothers her as much as being likened to an “Eastern” other. As such, Jane embraces her racial superiority and urges Rochester to go seek what he prefers in the East. Ironically, at this point, Jane is unaware that Rochester’s first wife is a foreigner – although not Turkish or Eastern, but rather from the West Indies. Yet he has had his taste of that and is now returning to the “little English girl” instead, degrading her with his choice of words, for even if she is English, she remains the lesser being. It is still Victorian ideology that subjugated any ‘Other.’ Zonana elaborates:

The narrative suggests that his [Rochester’s] association with Bertha has deformed him into a polygamous, sensual sultan... Thus Brontë appears to displace the blame for Rochester’s Eastern tendencies on the intrusion of this ‘Eastern’ woman into his Western life... The fact that he does not reform until Bertha dies suggests how powerful her oriental hold on him has been (177).

Zonana’s reading is one possible reading of the text’s racial politics, if a bit extreme. She finds that Bertha’s death is necessary for Rochester to be cleansed of “oriental” tendencies. Although this seems plausible, I do not wish to ignore that Bertha’s death happens at a very significant point in the plot, for it is only when Jane leaves Rochester that Bertha chooses to burn down the house, and dies in the process. Previously, there were many opportunities that presented themselves when Bertha might have murdered Jane or Rochester himself. Yet is it not an act of monstrosity, but rather, there is an element of sacrifice involved. Bertha’s act leaves Rochester disabled, but it is this disability itself that makes him more humane. As such, I do not read

Bertha's disappearance from Rochester's life as a release of the "oriental hold" she had on him, but rather, a release from Victorian and class ideologies that separated male from female, West from East, able-bodied from disabled, and the sane from the insane. Zonana articulates the reading I share with her: "Jane owes her freedom not to her own rebellion but to that of the actual 'harem-inmate', the 'dark-double' who acts as her proxy" (178). For it is not Jane who miraculously asserts her own subjectivity, but Bertha's *presence and lack of presence* that facilitates an ending for Jane (whether Jane's ending is a successful or a tragic one).

Disability/Mental Illness in *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre, even more than *Wuthering Heights*, is preoccupied with illness, troubled mental states, madness, disabled bodies, and disfigurement. As a Victorian text, it comes as no surprise that the nineteenth-century preoccupation with health and illness, sanity and insanity, figures so clearly in the novel and its characters. Surprisingly, it is only recently that the text has been examined from a Disability Studies view and under a different framework of the implications of the corporeal thematics in the text.⁴ There is always a fear of illness, of madness, of mental instability, and of being unfit to participate in proper Victorian society. If critics had previously read Bertha as Jane's dark double, then it is always madness and mental illness that Jane is struggling to escape, to not fall prey to. Similarly, Rochester fears Bertha's illness and is ashamed by his association with her, not only because she is mad, but because of her "excesses" (Brontë 261). Rochester explains that he "resolved to be clean in my own sight –and to the last I repudiated the contamination of her crimes, and wrenched myself from the connection with her

⁴ David Bolt, Julia Meile Roadas & Elizabeth J. Donaldson edited *The Madwoman and the Blindman: Jane Eyre, Discourse, Disability*. The volume was published in 2012 and includes an innovative approach to reading Jane Eyre from a Disability Studies perspective. Illness, embodiment, and caretaker relationships are closely examined in the text. The volume insists that it is not possible now to read *Jane Eyre* without a consideration of disability.

mental defects. Still, society associated my name and person with hers” (262). Bertha’s illness threatens the boundaries of clean/unclean, pure/impure, self/other, and Rochester fears “contamination.” In a similar vein, Rochester must come face to face with his own prejudices and phobias, and this is only done at the end of the novel, whereby Bertha’s starting of the fire and consequently disabling him, leaves Rochester in a spiritually-awakened state.

Our first encounter with the protagonist’s experience of mental agitation takes place in the red-room, where Jane is confined due to her supposedly rebellious and improper behaviour. At only ten years of age, she defies the male tyrannical figure of the household, her fourteen-year-old cousin, John Reed. Jane relays: “I resisted all the way...I was a trifle beside myself; or rather out of myself, as the French would say...like any other rebel slave, I felt resolved, in my desperation, to go all lengths.” (9) Immediately, the analogy between women and slaves is made obvious. Jane is a “rebel slave” and refuses to surrender. Naturally, punishment takes centre stage, as any uprising or slave revolt would be suppressed in Victorian England. Women were no different. Jane recognizes the oppression she faces as not only, simply, patriarchal in nature, but also, that there is a community of support that continues to uphold patriarchal tyranny. She states: “All of John Reed’s violent tyrannies, all his sisters’ proud indifference, all his mother’s aversion, all the servants’ partiality, turned up in my disturbed mind like a dark deposit in a turbid well. Why was I always suffering... forever condemned?” (11). Class and gender oppression are inextricably linked, alienating her from those around her, leaving her with a “disturbed mind.” External factors and society’s hierarchical power relations disturb the mind, and self-annihilation is always a threat; Jane constantly tries to hold on to any self-image and/or sense of self she can master. She is labelled a “mad cat” because she resists “all the way” (9). This is the first time the word ‘mad’ is mentioned in the text and the link is to an animal, to a cat,

a figure regularly associated with the feminine. Rendered the lowest on the social ladder, not-quite human, not-quite animal (“mad cat”), Jane’s image of herself is shaken. In the red-room, she comes face to face with her first episode of mental shock. The red-room, as described by the protagonist, “was a spare chamber, very seldom slept in; I might say never, indeed...this room was chill, because it seldom had a fire; it was silent, because remote from the nursery and kitchens” (10-11). The red-room then, function in the same way that the attic in which Bertha is kept –it is a confined space, a space that suffocates and threatens to disturb the mind, a space that further alienates, and annihilates the female sense of self. It is not a room for healing, for recovery, but rather for mental deterioration. Upon being imprisoned in the red-room, Jane’s mind begins to wander, and she begins to think that she is witnessing another person in the room:

Shaking my hair from my eyes, I lifted my head and tried to look boldly round the dark room. At this moment a light gleamed on the wall...I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern, carried by someone across the lawn: but then, prepared as my *mind* was for horror, shaken as my *nerves* were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some vision from another world (14, *my italics*).

The text’s preoccupation with the “mind” and “nerves” is apparent. In relaying the past events, Jane’s tone seems slightly apologetic, excusing her behaviour as irrational at the time, and distancing herself from any sort of mental non-equilibrium. It is worth noting that, presently, Jane narrates her story from a stronger position, that of a married woman, of Rochester’s wife. The present Jane distances herself from the former version of her inferior self. At the same time, Jane acknowledges the traumatic effects left on her emotional well-being: “No severe or prolonged bodily illness followed this incident of the red-room: it only gave my nerves a shock,

of which I feel the reverberation to this day. Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering” (16). Jane is aware that her mental and emotional state had been undermined, threatened, yet not entirely demolished, for they were but “fearful pangs.” She also stresses and distinguishes bodily illness/pain from mental suffering; there is a separation of one’s mental state from the physical. Upon hearing that Mr. Rochester has a wife; Jane’s reaction is immediately linked to her mental state: “My *nerves* vibrated to those low-spoken words as they had never vibrated to thunder” (247, *my italics*). Another example from the text is the conversation between Mr. Brocklehurst and Jane. When he asks Jane how she plans to avoid “a pit full of fire” her response is: “I must keep in good health and not die” (27). Very early on, even as a child, Jane wants to remain in “good health” and fears degeneration and death. The text is always revisiting the dyads of the mind/body, health/illness, and preoccupied with positioning the characters within these frameworks.

The healthy body was yet another tool to keep the British Empire’s image as superior intact. In “National Health: Defining and Defending Bodily Boundaries” Athena Vrettos argues that the individual’s body symbolized and represented a greater social body; Victorian culture and society emphasized the importance of healthy minds and bodies. During the nineteenth century, there was “growing concern about physical deterioration and the laws of health and hygiene grew steadily” (127). The ‘ideal’ body was healthy both in mind and physicality, and, more notably, capable of healing itself; it was not just the “absence of sickness” that was crucial, “but the ability to conquer disease, to wrestle with it...and throw it to the ground” (133). In the same vein, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane is able to ‘save herself’ from mental illness and physical illness, while Bertha’s mind and body must act out the fear of illness that constantly occupies Victorian ideologies of the ideal mind/body. Rochester himself admits that he had once contemplated

suicide: "I meant to shoot myself. I only entertained the intention for a moment; for not being insane, the crisis of exquisite and unalloyed despair which had originated the wish and design of self-destruction was passed in a second" (Brontë 263). Rochester, being male, English, and of a higher class, is able to overcome the suicidal thought and any depressive episode he may have had, for he is not "insane" (263). It is unsurprising, then, that the portrayal of mental illness in *Jane Eyre* is closely tied to monstrosity. The first encounter with Bertha is described, by Jane, as a "demoniac laugh – low, suppressed, and deep – uttered, as it seemed, at the very key-hole of my chamber-door... Something gurgled and moaned" (126). Bertha's madness/illness is described as "demoniac" and non-human. This is evident in the description of the attack on Mason (her stepbrother who negotiates her marriage to Rochester); the audience is informed that Mason is badly hurt. He is granted a voice to narrate the attack: "She bit me," he murmured. "She worried me like a *tigress*, when Rochester got the knife from her... She sucked the blood: she said she'd drain my heart" (181, *my italics*). At this point in the text, the readers (as well as Jane) is unaware that Bertha is actually human; all we know is that some creature, some demon, tigress, or even vampire has nearly committed murder, and threatened to "drain" Mason's heart. Once Jane comes face to face with this monstrous figure, the description is even more dehumanizing than Mason's. Her account refers to Bertha as an "it" rather than acknowledge her fellow 'sister'. Here is the detailed, up-close and personal description of the 'madwoman':

In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether *beast* or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild *animal*: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face (250, *my italics*).

Even through Jane's eyes, Bertha is subhuman, monstrous, and a figure that arouses fear. At the same time, there is almost a sense of fascination with Bertha's strength in the following lines: "She was a big woman...she showed virile force in the contest – more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was" (250). The only instance when it seems that Jane empathizes with Bertha is when she tells Rochester that Bertha "cannot help being mad" (257).

Rochester's preoccupation with maintaining his sanity is nearly as obsessive as Jane's concern about her "nerves." However, their relationship offers a few instances whereby Rochester's temper is hinted at. After discovering that he was intending to commit bigamy, Jane is resilient, refusing to react to his justifications and excuses. Of course, Rochester is angered and begins to lose control, for he is almost always in control of all 'others' around him.

'Jane! Will you hear *reason*?' (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear) 'because if you won't, I'll try *violence*.' His voice was hoarse; his look that of a man who is just about to burst an insufferable bond and plunge headlong into wild license. I saw that in another moment, and with one impetus of *frenzy* more, I should be able to do nothing with him. (258, *my italics*).

The text employs words such as reason, violence, and frenzy – all words that fall into the sanity/insanity binary. Here Rochester's version of "reason" is equated with his power to convince, control, and keep Jane. Jane panics because she realizes that they are slipping into dangerous grounds, the darkness of unreason and "frenzy." Jane is afraid of Rochester at this point and makes a decision to leave him. Rochester understands Jane's decision to leave him as a form of madness: "I pass over the madness about parting from me. You mean you must become a part of me...you shall yet be my wife" (259). Both characters read the other's motives and expression of desire as madness; both place great emphasis on the ability to remain safe and

distanced from the ‘other.’ At the end of their journey, the culmination of the relationship, when Jane returns to the now disabled Rochester, he thinks he is seized by ‘madness’: “What sweet madness has seized me?” (369) Jane’s response is that it is “no madness: your mind, sir, is too strong for delusion, your health too sound for frenzy” (369). The dialogue exchanged between them clearly demonstrates the text’s and the characters’ anxieties surrounding sanity/insanity, reason/passion, and health/illness. Even if Rochester is now physically disabled, Jane assures him that his mind is still sharp and “strong.” Mental illness, then, is the lesser binary in the dichotomy of physical illness/mental illness. Also, because it is Rochester who is physically disabled, and not Jane (a woman), or Bertha (a woman, and a Caribbean), then it is safe to suggest that his disability is not understood as annihilating; there is a continuity in his sense of self that is not interrupted.

The disabling of Rochester in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is necessary for all three characters: Jane, Rochester, and Bertha. Only when he is “helpless...blind and a cripple” does his relationship with Jane culminate in marriage (365). Jane proclaims her desire to be Rochester’s caretaker, not merely a lover or a wife: “I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper...I will be your companion – to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live” (370). Jane offers herself to Rochester as a loving and supportive caretaker, unlike the way by which he was Bertha’s caretaker. The lesson is self-evident; Rochester has now been made vulnerable, more human, and more tolerant of the ‘other’ because he now occupies a marginalized position. Jane questions: “Where was his daring stride now?” and “And, reader, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity? – if you do, you little know me” (367). The choice of words is, although affectionate, also very stigmatizing to the

disabled community. In Jane's words, disability marks fear, and in Rochester's own understanding of the disabled body, repulsive: "I thought you would be revolted, Jane, when you saw my arm and cicatrised visage" (372). The discourse on disability in Brontë's work is consistent with the narrative's fascination with and fear of mental and physical illness. As such, the appropriation of physical disability in Rochester's characterization is what critics David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have termed "narrative prosthesis." In their influential study, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, they examine literary representations of characters with disabilities, and the significance of such a device as "narrative prosthesis" in character development. Mitchell and Snyder claim that in literature, the function of the disabled character is two-fold: "first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device. We term this perpetual discursive dependency upon disability *narrative prosthesis*" (47). Disabled bodies, then, are employed in narratives, both to be analysed and to serve as a metaphor, offering insight and perhaps delivering a message that is central to the narrative's themes. As Jane informs her audience: "Mr. Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near –that knit us so very close! For I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand." (Brontë 384) This is the reason that Rochester must be disabled, for the two protagonists to come together. The problem with Rochester's disability, is that it seems to be equated with inferiority and a punishment. His disability seems to solicit from Jane a desire to be a caretaker, rather than an equal partner.

Rochester's disability is also strategically placed at the end of the novel, only after Bertha's annihilation and demise. She is the cause of his disability, and the text seems to suggest negative connotations of this disability. Mitchell and Snyder pose the problem: "Disability inaugurates an explanatory need that the unmarked body eludes by virtue of its physical

anonymity. To participate in an ideological system of bodily norms that promotes some kinds of bodies while devaluing others is to ignore the malleability of bodies” (59-60). Brontë specifically does just that – her text devalues bodies that are ill, mad, or disabled. Yet at the same time, because of the Biblical and Christian ideologies evident in the text, Brontë seems to suggest that Rochester’s disability is a form of punishment he must endure. One of the contributors to Bolt’s volume *The Madwoman and the Blindman*, Essaka Joshua, focuses on Rochester’s disability. Essaka Joshua’s chapter ‘I Began to See: Biblical Models of Disability in *Jane Eyre*’ examines this phenomenon of illness/disability and punishment alongside Biblical understandings of the disabled body. Joshua notes that “disability in the Bible is often a marker of low social status as much as it is a physical or mental condition” (111). Joshua stresses that this has caused great distress for Disability Studies’ scholars, precisely because “biblical texts present an overwhelmingly negative attitude toward disability” (113). For Joshua, there is no punishment in disability, and she finds that Brontë places emphasis on the healing of the self, the spiritual essence of Rochester, even if his body is suffering, that Rochester’s “blindness...is also the beginning of his spiritual sight” (119). Thus, even if we postulate that the text’s discourse on disability and illness is a negative and fearful one, consistent with Victorian models of reading the body, we can still read Rochester’s disability as enabling, rather than as a downbeat, dehumanizing ending. Most readings by critics have suggested that Rochester’s disability is a divine punishment, while others have argued that it is Bertha who punishes Rochester. Equally, it is arguable that God’s or Bertha’s disabling of Rochester is not a punishment at all, but rather a blessing that allows him to be *rehumanized*, rather than *dehumanized*. It is a reading that allows room for a more hopeful understanding of disabled bodies, and takes us away from the

punishment theory. Bertha and Jane both aid in Rochester's recovery, his journey back to humanity.

Wide Sargasso Sea: The 'Other' Woman Takes Centre Stage

Like *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1965) opens with a young girl's narrative, and follows her journey towards adulthood; it is a female *Bildungsroman*. However, Antoinette/Bertha's journey does not culminate in marriage, but in death. She marries the Englishman, Rochester, and is taken away from her Creole identity, her culture, and her country, Jamaica; as such, she is taken away from herself, and descends into madness. The rewriting of Antoinette/Bertha's character by Jean Rhys provides a new understanding, a new story, and the story of the silenced other, the subaltern subject denied a voice throughout Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is necessary for the examination of the patriarchal and colonial ideologies that have oppressed and annihilated Antoinette/Bertha. It is a text that exemplifies the politics of domesticity, marriage, and the colonization of the mind and the body that take place upon the coloniser's/imperialist's invasion. Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the symbol for the coloniser/imperialist and Antoinette/Bertha represents the West Indian Creole or other woman who constantly fights a double-colonization, that of patriarchy and colonialism/imperialism.

Wide Sargasso Sea, then, is the revision of *Jane Eyre*, the re-writing of Bertha's character. Elizabeth Baer, in "The Sisterhood of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway" reads Jane and Antoinette as more similar than different, asserting that they "are not polar opposites, nor a handy dichotomy, but sisters, doubles, orphans in the patriarchy. Each woman, in her own way, resists temptations...and wrests her identity from the patriarchal hypocrisy of 'happily ever after'" (147). Although Baer's sister solidarity argument is valid, she also claims that "Antoinette [is] the instrument of Jane's survival...[and]the story from which Jane learns" (148).

This reading renders Antoinette nearly invisible, as the one who must make the mistakes in order for Jane to “learn” from them and emerge as a whole, new character. It also ignores the unquestionable fact of Antoinette’s Creole identity and her position as ‘Other’ to Jane, the European imperial subject. However, Baer’s strongest argument is her reading of the text as a *Bildungsroman*:

Measured against the standards of the male *Bildungsroman*, Antoinette’s development, ending as it does in madness and suicide, is an abject failure. Perhaps this is what has attempted critics to use the facile label, victim...when looked at in the context of the female quest, Antoinette is at least partially successful. Given the time at which she lives (1830s), her colonial background, her convent education, and the limited scope of possibilities for women, Antoinette’s final torching of Thornfield Hall is an act of assertion, of defiance, of symbolic identification with her West Indian heritage. She courageously re-writes the Cinderella story, alerting subsequent generations of women to the fallacy (and the danger) of giving it credence (134).

Antoinette’s ending is not altogether tragic, as I had argued earlier in my analysis of *Jane Eyre*. Like Baer, I find that Antoinette’s journey is a *Bildungsroman*, but I do not wish to ignore her function as the ‘other’ Eastern subject, a character that is always silenced in *Jane Eyre* and depicted as monstrous.

Antoinette is constantly negotiating her identity within multiple terrains. Most significantly, the renaming of Antoinette as Bertha, is crucial to the character’s mental breakdown and self-disintegration. In “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” Spivak argues:

In the figure of Antoinette, whom in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester violently renames Bertha, Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism. Antoinette, as a white Creole child growing up at the time of emancipation in Jamaica, is caught between the English imperialist and the black native (269).

Spivak also discusses the ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The last few lines in the text, when Antoinette realizes her role is crucial to her positioning as the ‘other’ woman who must be killed off in order to make room for her ‘sister’ Jane:

In this fictive England, she must play out her role, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the coloniser. At least Rhys sees to it that the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister’s consolidation (270).

Spivak’s argument captures powerfully the function of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* as opposed to her presence in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Like Spivak, I think we should consider *Jane Eyre* in light of the “epistemic violence of imperialism” that writes itself continuously throughout the text and the positioning of Bertha as the racial Other who must make way for the British subject. Rhys’s text attempts to bring Antoinette/Bertha’s story forward, foregrounding it as crucial to a better understanding of the supposed “insane animal” behaviour that Brontë depicts. Rhys’s text humanizes Antoinette and recreates her as a character who does not happen simply to ‘go mad’; instead, the text presents the multitude of tensions that play out onto her psyche and sense of self, including family history, but most importantly the dynamics of Empire.

Antoinette's madness does not just happen; the external factors are almost always a toxic combination of patriarchy and colonialism. In the introduction to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Angela Smith confirms: "In an uncanny doubling of her mother's story, which has been constantly prophesied by malicious neighbours, Antoinette re-enacts her mother's experience: she marries an Englishman and is driven mad by the tension between his assumptions about her and demands on her, and her precarious sense of where she belongs" (xiii). In the words of Christophine, Antoinette's mother was not simply mad: "They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for awhile and they shut her away... They act like she is mad... But no kind word, no friends... Ah there is no God" (101). Spivak claims that "Christophine is tangential to this narrative. She cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native" (272). According to Spivak, Christophine's story is the subaltern story and the voice of the 'other.' Christophine used to be 'owned' by Antoinette's mother, and was Antoinette's nurse as a child. Christophine is the voice of wisdom in the text, the matriarch who speaks against patriarchy and colonialism, although she occupies the lowest position on the social ladder; she is a black slave, doubly oppressed by the whites and the white Creoles, the other's other. Christophine, however, is able to diagnose and assess the real cause of Antoinette's mother's madness, understanding that she was driven to it, and that she received no proper treatment and was given no real chance at healing. When she states "Ah there is no God", Christophine calls on the injustices of the world, this universal oppression that is unfathomable. Perhaps the most powerful line, and the most perceptive, is her assessment of the universal condition of women who are oppressed by patriarchy. She states: "All women, all colours, nothing but fools... I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man" (69). Christophine understands that Antoinette's mother and

Antoinette herself are both driven mad, both exploited and taken advantage of. Christophine tells Rochester: “You want her money but you don’t want her. It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. I know it. The doctors say what you tell them to say” (103). Christophine is aware that even science and medicine have conspired against women, branding women as mad if the male figures in their lives say they are; she recognizes the institutional violence that attempts to stifle women. Also, Rochester takes over Antoinette’s finances and everything she owns, as Antoinette relays to Christophine:

‘I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him.’

‘What you tell me there?’ she [Christophine] said sharply.

‘That is English law.’

‘Law! The Mason boy fix it, that boy worse than Satan and he burn in Hell one of these fine nights...’ (69).

The Law works against the welfare of women, of Antoinette, and Christophine scoffs at the absurdity of the law, pointing out that the “Mason boy” (Antoinette’s stepbrother) has meddled with it. Mason is yet another patriarch who works together with Rochester to deprive Antoinette of her freedom and finances. Just like her mother, Antoinette was robbed financially, and robbed of her culture, identity, and sanity.

Antoinette’s character undergoes a split of the psyche, a split that takes place when colonialism and patriarchy work against the female sense of subjectivity. Patrick Hogan’s chapter on “Colonialism, Patriarchy, and Creole Identity” tackles Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the repercussions of colonial and patriarchal forces on Antoinette’s loss of identity and self, specifically her “tragic madness...the extinction of identity and the mere bodily demise” (87). It is Antoinette’s self that is first lost, and second, her physical existence, “bodily demise”, after

she dies in the fire at Thornfield. Hogan suggests that Antoinette's mental breakdown is the result of multiple factors. He examines the alienation she feels when her name keeps changing:

The fragmentation of her perceptual and practical identity is paralleled by a continual un-naming and renaming...the unfixing is a direct, if unusually extreme, result of patriarchy. Initially, her name is Cosway, then Mason when her mother remarries, then Rochester...her husband not only changes Antoinette's patronym, but her given name as well...He also names her 'Marionette', a mere manipulated thing, a puppet...without reflection or autonomous action, without social connectedness...without identity...Image and name dissolve concurrently, and their dissolution is central to the severing of social links, a severing enacted through a structure of fathers and husbands (93).

Antoinette recognizes the significance of both her name and the mirror which is taken away from her:

Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass....There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now...they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I? (Rhys 117).

She is denied the right to her own name, and the right to seeing her reflection; there is no mirror she can look into, no method by which she can recognize herself physically nor mentally. The loss of the self and self-image, self-perception, is evident.

Moreover it is not only imperial and white supremacist patriarchy that works against Antoinette, but also the law, leaving her identity always linked to a man, always named as a man's property: her name is no longer hers, and her money is handed over (with the help of

Mason) to Rochester. Hogan clarifies this very important point: “This fracturing of identity is again, invariably social...defined not only by personal ideologies of race and gender, but necessarily by political economy as well...law too occludes Antoinette’s social identity” (99). She has no legal status – it comes as no surprise, then, that she only attacks Mason when he concurs that he cannot “interfere between you and your husband legally” (Rhys 120). Grace Poole (Antoinette’s caretaker) reminds Antoinette how she attacked Mason: “I was in the room but I didn’t hear all he said except ‘I cannot interfere legally between you and your husband.’ It was when he said ‘legally’ that you flew at him and when he twisted the knife out of your hand that you bit him” (120). It is the word ‘legally’ that she reacts violently to, and for good reason. As Hogan puts it: “Law...occludes Antoinette’s social identity. Indeed, it further undermines what little economic status she has. Through marriage, she becomes nothing, a statueless nonentity...Rochester successfully evaded equity, to bind Antoinette by common law...Antoinette, imprisoned by Rochester, can take no action on her own behalf” (99-100). She appeals to Mason to help her, to save her, but his only response is that he cannot “interfere”; ironically, he is the one who first arranged for her marriage to Rochester in the first place. Not only does Mason refuse to help Antoinette, but he leaves her even more alienated than before he came to see her. She says: ““I remember now that he did not recognize me...He looked at me and spoke to me as though I were a stranger” (Rhys 120). Mason’s reaction to Antoinette further destabilizes her sense of self and her identity; his presence symbolizes her past, her home, her identity, yet he refuses to acknowledge her or give her any sense of affirmation of her being. This leads Antoinette into a violent rage and she attacks him. In Brontë’s version of this scene, we are merely informed that it was as though Mason was attacked by an animal, badly bitten, left bleeding, for no reason, and without cause. Rhys masterfully recreates the scene, placing Grace

Poole as the unbiased witness who relays the events of this meeting to Antoinette. Since it is Grace who describes the attack, and not Rochester, nor Mason, nor Antoinette, then we receive an unbiased account of the attack, one that does not reduce Antoinette to a monstrous figure, a subhuman, as *Jane Eyre* does.

In terms of her Creole identity, Antoinette occupies a marginalized, hybridized position. She is neither fully white, nor is she black. In a community which rejects her status as one that occupies more than one position, she finds no sense of belonging. Antoinette shares her very personal and private dilemma with Rochester: “And I’ve heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all” (Rhys 64). This is a painful confession, one that she shares with Rochester, despite his critical gaze and his superiority. Antoinette’s vulnerability only fuels Rochester’s supposed racial superiority. His view of her, at least physically, is embedded with racial ideologies: “I watched her critically. She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting... Long, sad, *dark alien* eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not *English* or *European* either” (Rhys 40, *my italics*). This ambivalence in her identity and hybridized position that Antoinette occupies is threatening to Rochester. Similarly, the country itself makes him extremely uncomfortable. This is the conversation between Rochester and Antoinette:

‘I feel very much a stranger here,’ I said. ‘I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side.’ [Rochester]

‘You are quite mistaken... It is not for you and not for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else. I found that out long ago when I was a child.’ (Rhys 82-3).

Rochester is preoccupied with class, gender, and race divisions and binaries. For him, it is always self/other, whites/blacks, male/female, us/them. He translates his sense of non-belonging into an antagonistic dyad of self versus other, and positions the other as the immediate enemy. On the other hand, Antoinette's understanding is more perceptive and accurate; she recognizes that his fear stems from the unknown, that which is Other to the self, yet is also not classifiable and occupies multiple terrains. Her analysis of the situation proves to be very dauntingly perceptive, and there is wisdom and rationality in her choice of words; at this point, there is nothing 'mad' about her character.

In all of the texts I have selected, the madwomen figures speak up against society and they are able to articulate an almost uncanny knowledge of society's failings and oppression. Madwomen figures throughout this thesis speak, but are not heard. Antoinette, for example, attempts to bridge the gap between herself and Rochester, who remains unwilling to accept her or anything that is Other to himself. Rochester does not believe in class, gender, or race equality. He does not listen to her, and he does not understand Antoinette's ability to interact with the slaves:

'Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?' [Rochester]

'Why not?' [Antoinette]

I wouldn't hug and kiss them.' I'd say, 'I couldn't.' (Rhys 57).

Rochester exemplifies the colonialist's racist ideologies of hierarchies and power. He constantly separates himself from all others, positioning himself as the superior Englishman. He deals with Antoinette as a child, as inferior based on her race and sex: "If she was a child she was not a stupid child but an obstinate one. She often questioned me about England, listened attentively to my answers, but I was certain that nothing I said made much difference. Her mind was already

made up” (Rhys 58). From the very beginning of their relationship, he is unsatisfied with her character, her supposedly stubborn behaviour, and her mind –although she never verbally challenges him, he is still threatened, even her silence is intimidating for him.

Throughout their conversations, Rhys manages to portray Antoinette as the reasonable one, while Rochester’s lack of empathy and logic is apparent. Nonetheless, Rochester expects Antoinette to mirror his actions, as he expects her to accept the name-change he has devised for her:

‘Don’t laugh like that, Bertha.’

‘My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?’

‘Because it is a name I’m particularly fond of.’ (86)

Rochester attempts to exercise control over Antoinette by dictating how she should laugh, act, speak, and what her name ought to be, a name that he prefers. She asks him logical questions, but he responds with unreasonable answers. Antoinette’s confusion is caused by Rochester’s hostility and lack of care for her: “Then why do you never come near me?” she said. ‘Or kiss me, or talk to me. Why do you think I can bear it, what reason have you for treating me like that? Have you any *reason?*’ (81, *my italics*). It is Rochester’s actions that are unreasonable, yet never once is he accused of madness. He occupies a strong position, one that remains unthreatened by any action or lack thereof on his part. When Antoinette finally realizes his ploy to destroy her, she states: “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name” (Rhys 94). Antoinette is able to see through Rochester’s plan and his actions, his desire to recreate her into a vision of an Englishwoman he might have preferred to marry. Like Catherine (*Wuthering Heights*), Ammu (*The God of Small Things*), Maha (*Pillars of Salt*) and

Fatima (*The Tent*), Antoinette's voice, the voice of the madwoman, is the voice of true reason.

Taming her and silencing her becomes Rochester's objective, as madwomen are always silenced.

The mental and emotional strain of dealing with Antoinette takes its toll on Rochester's body. For example, Rochester is ill upon first arriving in Jamaica: "I was married a month after I arrived in Jamaica and for nearly three weeks of that time I was in bed with fever" (40). Illness presents itself in Rhys's text, in the same way that it appears numerous in Brontë's text; always threatening the well-being of the characters, it is something to be feared, avoided, and signals impending destruction of either the subject or those surrounding him/her. Rochester manages entirely to annihilate and destroy Antoinette, rendering her invisible, labelling her as a "Bertha", a name fit for an Englishwoman, but she remains never quite a Bertha, never quite an Englishwoman, and instead loses all perception of self and her identity. Even her homeland she feels is now tainted, for Rochester has managed to destroy that, too: "But I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate...I hate it now like I hate you and before I *die* I will show you how much I hate you" (Rhys 95, *my italics*). The power of the madwoman/invalid is precisely that she is perceived as out of control, as unpredictable, and thus able to threaten those around her with her 'madness.' Antoinette is aware of her physical demise even before her mental stability is threatened; her threat to "die" resonates with Catherine Earnshaw's desire to punish Edgar and Heathcliff (and herself) by dying. Antoinette, however, also intends to let Rochester know precisely how much pain he has caused her.

All of the madwomen figures in this study are eventually confined. Antoinette is confined to the attic, Jane is temporarily confined to the red-room, Catherine is bedridden in Thrushcross Grange, Ammu is imprisoned in her parents' home, Maha and Um Saad in a mental asylum, and Fatima's movement is constricted in a tent. Once confined in the attic, Antoinette's mental and

emotional well-being deteriorates even more quickly. The room she is left in is similar to the red-room that young Jane endures in *Jane Eyre*. It is a room where she is left to suffer: “There is one window high up –you cannot see out of it. My bed had doors but they have been taken away. There is not much else in the room” (Rhys 116). It is an enclosed space, a space that breaks any mental wholeness she might still possess. Antoinette is left in an attic, where she only has her red dress, the only item she has managed to keep from her homeland; everything else is severed. The dress carries memories of the past, of her home: “The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vetivert and frangipani, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain” (120). Again, like Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, Antoinette is transported from nature to the supposedly cultured/civilized world, to the world of “cardboard...this cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it” (Rhys 117). This is the prison she must endure, for a crime that is unknown to her. Treatment of women in the Victorian era meant confinement to a room, no matter the duration. For someone like Antoinette, who comes from a different society and culture, this further aggravates her condition. She becomes dissociated from herself and can no longer find any part of her. Finally, at the end of the text, she recognizes herself in the mirror: “It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of a tablecloth and I saw flames shoot up” (123). After Antoinette comes face to face with her ghost, the result is the burning of Thornfield. Annihilation of herself, along with all others, happens once the fire starts. There is already dissociation, a mental and emotional death, and the final outcome is the physical death, the demise of Antoinette. As she looks up, she notices that the sky “was red and all my life was in it. I saw the

grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and...the tree of life in flames. The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones" (123). In Rhys's version of the fire, Antoinette almost reaches out to the fire gladly, happily, attempting to cross over into another world, an alter-reality. The sky is filled with her past, her home, her identity. Her wild hair, at least from her perspective, is similar to wings; there is an obvious allusion to freedom, liberation, and the capacity to rise up. The death, then, is not a tragic one, and she is able to recover a part of her past, her history, and a part of her sense of self through her death.

In *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, madness features as a theme that provides an escape from the violence inflicted by Victorian culture and society. Both texts reveal the inextricability of racial and gender politics. *Wide Sargasso Sea* deals with the subject more explicitly: there is no question that Antoinette/Bertha's illness is aggravated, if not caused by, racial and gender ideologies, power hierarchies, British imperialism, colonialism and patriarchy. Jean Rhys takes the fragile intimacies of these Victorian texts and creates a text that attempts to make sense of the madness that hovers within the sidelines of her predecessors' texts, bringing the theme of madness to the forefront. By reading together the three texts, the figure of the 'madwoman' may be read in its multiple manifestations of the effects of a Victorian culture, a culture that built its centrality/subjectivity on the disavowal of the other. The madwomen all share a common struggle, a struggle to escape from the Victorian English dichotomous thought that chose to exclude them, while appropriating their bodies and property, from polite imperial society and culture.

Chapter Two: The Mad in *The God of Small Things*

Postcolonial critics have suggested that the aftermath of colonialism remains deeply embedded within the colonised's psyche. The damage done to the land is mirrored by the personal damage inflicted onto the colonised people: multiple fractured psyches, identities, and bodies. The mutilation reiterates itself and reaffirms its devastating effects by harming the private and the public domain, the personal and the political, the mind and the body, and most significantly, the individual and the collective. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a novel that protests loudly, a text that both mourns and celebrates the colonised, and presents the image of India as closely linked to the colonised Indian woman – in the face of colonization, racism, and sexism, she has barely any chance of survival and resistance. Roy's novel is powerful in its raw emotion, its careful observation of the inextricability of the political and the personal, and its transgressive form, plot, and characters. I read the text as a 'mad' or deranged text, filled with memory lapses, confusion, disorientation, and undoubtedly, trauma. In *The God of Small Things*, madness and colonization and its aftermath are significant markers of the colonised mind and body. This chapter aims to consider madness in a colonised state, madness as both a consequence of colonisation, and of imperial manipulation of indigenous patriarchy, and madness as an enabling transgression through which supposedly 'mad' female characters bear the potential to challenge public politics through their private lives and small acts. *The God of Small Things* is a title that refers to a male God, yet it is primarily preoccupied with a web of female and subaltern characters whose private lives are mirrored by the nation's deterioration.

Fredric Jameson's essay on "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" examines the link between the private and the public, especially in the postcolonial novel:

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society (69).

Roy's text offers such an allegory, if not multiple allegories, as it is not one singular story of the nation, but rather it presents a multitude of stories, of individuals whose lives are ruled by a lingering colonial past. More specifically, the text focuses on different Indian women's stories, their minds and bodies, their existence within a society ruled by colonial effects, the caste system, patriarchy, and the state. Ania Loomba states that "from the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond), female bodies symbolize the conquered land" (129). Because the colonised female subject represents the colonised, raped land, the parallelisms are apparent, and it comes as no surprise then that Roy creates female characters who are at war, both internally and externally, with the private and the public realm. Not only does Roy portray characters that are troubled and disoriented, mirroring the state of the nation, but she also uses the text itself as yet another allegory. The text is fragmented, wild, untamed, and rebellious. It threatens borders and binaries, definitions and categories, and resists upheld notions of what constitutes English literature, English grammar, spelling, and the rules of syntax. Helen Tiffin, in "Postcolonial Literatures and Counter-discourse", alludes to a similar process of writing back to the West, to the English canon, and terms it "literary revolution" (101). Roy's text is a beautifully written

reformation of the English language and this will be apparent in the passages I quote throughout the chapter.

The madness that contaminates the entire culture of the people and their sense of self is evident throughout the text; I call this condition “assimilation madness.” Assimilation madness here is a result of the pressure to assimilate, to forge an altogether different identity, one that pleases both patriarchal society and the coloniser’s expectations. Assimilation madness creates a split from one’s past, one’s native identity and the new or modernised identity one feels pressured to adopt. I choose to bring to bear Amilcar Cabral’s “National Liberation and Culture” for the purpose of examining the way that the culture of the colonised has to be erased, and assimilation takes place, leaving the colonised bewildered and in a state of loss: “In fact, to take up arms to dominate a people, above all, to take up arms to destroy, or at least to neutralize, to paralyze, its cultural life” (Cabral 53). By doing so, the coloniser guarantees the colonised’s devotion and assimilation of the coloniser’s values and culture, including depreciating one’s own culture and subsequently, self. Both the collective and the individual are affected by this sense of degradation that becomes internalized. Cabral calls it “progressive assimilation... which turns out to be only a more or less violent attempt to deny the culture of the people in question” (54). Assimilation also entails “cultural alienation of a part of the population” as the colonised adopts the white man’s mentality and rejects his/her own self and culture (57). Of course, this “social gap between the indigenous elites and the popular masses” is most aptly portrayed in the Ipe family’s reaction to Ammu’s relationship with Velutha. They are repulsed and repelled by that relationship, because Ammu, unlike Chacko, does not pursue the supposedly superior white man/woman. She instead chooses (consciously or unconsciously) the Untouchable, the farthest person from the white man, and as such, she becomes expelled from society, unlike Chacko, who

finds pride and a sense of accomplishment in his relationship with Margaret. Ammu is the most resistant to assimilation, and as a result, she is the one who is outcast and rejected both by her family and the larger collective community. Ammu's character is not usually read by critics as a 'madwoman' character, instead, the focus of madness in the novel is her son, Estha, who retreats into silence and is very clearly traumatized. Estha is read as suffering from psychological trauma, while Ammu is simply read as 'dangerous' or transgressive. I read Ammu as someone outcasted from society not only because she is a transgressive woman, but more importantly, because her actions are deemed mad. Ammu's 'madness', then, carries a certain sense of agency, and she is the predominant figure of protest in the novel.

The God of Small Things won the Booker Prize in 1997. Julie Mullaney's study *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: A Reader's Guide* is one of a handful of scholarly works that have approached Roy's text in detail, paying attention to the author's background, the plot, and provides a concise introduction to the main themes and tropes of the novel. Mullaney recognizes the great critical reception of the novel and that it was "published in over forty different languages," and "has sold over six million copies worldwide" (13). Although Mullaney's study does not provide more than a basic approach to the novel, it aims to aid those who are tackling the text for the first time. With its complex structure, Roy's novel is both demanding and daring. It demands to be read repeatedly, it requires that the reader merges with the narrator, that the reader assumes an active position, working at all times to place together the scattered images of the narrative and the chaotic timeline of events. The text requires a constant revisiting of major themes, subtexts, and explicit as well as implicit material. *The God of Small Things* is a postmodern, postcolonial, protest novel, and it is its multiple occupations of various classifications that place it as one of the most widely read texts in Postcolonial Studies; it is

found on the course syllabi of undergraduate and graduate classes, and is working its way into the canon. Roy's only novel has gained worldwide recognition and critical reception in a very short time span, placing her amongst successful Indian writers such as Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, R.K. Narayan, to name a few. In "Locusts Stand I: Some Feminine Aspects of *The God of Small Things*," Mohit Ray reads the text as a novel that occupies several different genres and categories:

It is a modern novel in its theme and the treatment of the theme, a postmodern novel in its knotting and knitting of narrative threads, manipulation of expressive literary forms and creative 'play' with words, a feminist novel in the pity and terror that it evokes for the condition of women in a particular cultural milieu, a political novel in its criticism of the hypocrisy of the communist party (49).

Roy's novel may be read in different ways, classified according to different genres, but I think it can be most illuminatingly read as a hybrid text, a postcolonial feminist 'mad' text.

The novel exposes above all the workings of madness in a postcolonial context. This time, the focus is not on a madwoman in an attic (Brontë's *Jane Eyre*) or in an asylum (Faqr's *Pillars of Salt*) or in a tent (Al-Tahawy's *The Tent*). Madness is not confined to a certain space and it does not afflict one person or one woman, but rather, madness is everywhere in Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The characters suffer from psychological traumas, the men suffer from colonial damage to their 'manhood' and the women endure the consequences of colonial, racial and sexist ideologies that perpetuate their continued oppression through a number of generations. Roy weaves the themes of madness, abjection and trauma together, never once allowing us to forget the initial trauma of Empire and colonialism.

The argument of this chapter emphasizes the fact that colonialism severely impacted the mental state of the collective community and the individual. My focus is on the female protagonists' state of mind and the trauma that they endure. In *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, Patrick Hogan identifies colonialism as a breeder of insanity, as a trauma which shatters the individual's sense of self as well as the collective identity of the nation. Hogan asserts that "in literature, madness is often bound up with loss of the past... a severing of one's connection to practices and habits continuous with childhood and with earlier generations. Those practices and habits constitute identity, or part of it" (83). Roy's main characters are Rahel and Estha, twins who grow up deeply disturbed by their past, by their childhood, and their separation from each other, as well as Ammu, their mother. Hogan asserts that separation from the past in a violent way is a precursor of destabilizing identity and fracturing one's sense of self. Even more specifically, Hogan terms the psychosocial dysfunction the "psychopathology of racism" which affects colonised people and those who are pressured to adopt the culture of the coloniser (67). In my reading of Roy's *The God of Small Things* I will consider the ways by which the characters suffer from assimilation and mimeticism, internalize the coloniser's values and simultaneously reject their culture and devalue their own identities. Roy presents three generations of Indian women in the Ipe family, yet all of them are victims of colonialism, imperialism, and post-colonialism/neocolonialism. Of course women had to deal with both colonisation and patriarchy at home, colonialism and the British Empire worsened the conditions at home, as I argue throughout.

Not only does Roy expose patriarchy and colonialism in *The God of Small Things*, but also she deals with the dominant caste system in India, a system that has devastating effects on the twins' mother, Ammu, and her Untouchable lover, Velutha. Because of Ammu and Velutha's

cross-caste affair, the twins are separated from their mother, as she is deemed unfit to be a mother, and Velutha is killed brutally by the police. Hogan offers an explanation of the reasons behind this exploitation of certain traditions and belief systems:

The intrusion of colonial culture...disrupt[s] ordinary routines and beliefs. The coloniser ridicules and seeks to alter or outlaw aspects of the indigenous culture. One consequence of this is reactionary traditionalism. Practices...may become rigidified and absolute in the face of colonialist objections...In that way, they come to be seen as crucial to the preservation of the culture (177).

Roy recognizes the multiple oppressions and injustices, careful not to devise an attack solely on the West and British colonialism. Her novel is a critique of the caste system as well and the ways by which its system of othering and oppression resonates with British colonialism and imperialism. The two systems, in Indian culture, were inextricably linked, as my reading of Roy's text will demonstrate.

The God of Small Things spans multiple generations of women, beginning with Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Ammu, Kochu Maria (although she is not a main character) and Rahel. The female characters' lives overlap; there are many series of transgressions and mental, emotional, as well as physical repercussions. Colonised women faced both the oppressions of patriarchy and colonialism/neocolonialism. Their identities, subjectivities, and bodies, were controlled and regulated by both Indian and British cultures. In "Mapping the Colonial Body: Sexual Economies and the State in Colonial India" Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick explain the role of the British colonisers and missionaries in controlling Indian women's lives and specifically, their bodies, their sense of space, and their place within their own society. Indian culture and tradition was not divorced from British ideological restraints on women. Rather, both

cultures worked against Indian women. Price and Shildrick maintain that the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century saw a rise in new “techniques of discipline and surveillance for the female body” (394). This took place during the British colonial era; “in the same way that the colonial state regulated and enclosed the landscape of India” the same control of Indian women’s subjectivities and bodies was happening. Different institutions, including churches, hospitals, schools, all worked together to keep Indian women restricted in their private spheres, in their bodies, and “an invidious control was exercised, in often minor and individualized ways, over the gestures, movements, language, and appearance of women and children and the custodianship of the missionaries” (394-95). Power relations were kept intact, female bodies were confined to the private sphere, and the public sphere continued to dominate and oppress Indian women.

Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, as well as Pappachi, the Imperial Entomologist (who worked for the British before Independence and after), are all assimilated subjects who reiterate the cycle of oppression and othering which colonialism fostered. With colonialism came an increase in government by violence. Homi Bhabha’s “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition” considers the ways by which cultural alienation and colonial relations further alienate the self from the other, and the self from within the self. Bhabha asserts that “the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master’s place while keeping his place in the slave’s *avenging* anger” (117). As such, in Roy’s text, the assimilated Ipe family renders itself superior and attempts to establish authority over others. Assimilation is a form of madness, because of the cultural alienation and the alienation from within the self. Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* is an indispensable study of mental disorders in the colonies. Fanon raises questions

and provides specific examples of patients he treated in Algeria, but nevertheless, I will draw on his study to shed light on Roy's literary text, emphasizing that literature and reality are *not* one and the same, but there is a common resonance between lived people's experiences and literary characters. Fanon tells us that colonization depended on a "systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity" (182). Roy's characters, the Ipe family (excluding Ammu), thrive on maintaining their position in society, while dismissing and disavowing the other – whether it is Velutha the Untouchable, the factory workers, lower-class women, or the poor. The "assimilation madness" that they are afflicted by haunts the novel as they try to internalize the culture of the coloniser and re-enact oppression and the oppressive cycle of colonialism. In Fanon's words:

In order to assimilate the culture of the oppressor and venture into his fold, the colonised subject has had to pawn some of his own intellectual possessions. For instance, one of the things he has had to assimilate is the way the colonialist bourgeoisie thinks (13).

Pappachi, the father figure, the ruler of the Ipe household, has assimilated and internalized the way the coloniser thinks and acts. He represents the native that Fanon speaks of; he attempts to become an oppressor in his own home, with his family, and unsurprisingly, it is the women in the family who suffer the most. In "Ayemenem and the Ayemenem House: A Study of the Setting of *The God of Small Things*," Simon Barnabas closely examines the characters in relation to their domestic setting, the Ayemenem house. He reads Pappachi as a man afflicted by Anglophilia, "a kind of slavish admiration... Even during the most humid seasons in Ayemenem he wears his three-piece suit" (303). Pappachi dresses and acts like the coloniser, and most significantly, instils fear in Ammu and his wife, whom he constantly batters. Barnabas explains:

Pappachi's treatment of his daughters deserves special mention because it not only exemplifies his inherent urge to discriminate against the female offspring, but also indicates how intensely his brutish violence has affected Ammu's psyche to turn against the violence of her imposing family (303).

The violence cycle is repeated at home, in the private sphere, the domus, and the coloniser's mental, emotional, and physical violence is transferred into the home, into families.

Although Pappachi's physical violence is directed only at his wife, Ammu also suffers from her father's incurable "assimilation madness." Perhaps the most significant example which exemplifies Ammu's disappointment in her father is his refusal to believe the story behind her divorce: "Pappachi would not believe her story –not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because he didn't believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man's wife" (Roy 42). Pappachi has so deeply internalized a sense of worshipping of the coloniser, that he idolizes the white man. Fanon describes it aptly in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "Sin is black as virtue is white" (118). As such, the white man, the coloniser, cannot, in Pappachi's blinded judgment, commit a crime or a sin. As for Ammu's husband, he is unable to defend or protect his family, nor Ammu. In the face of the white man, he is unable to feel anything but inferiority, and as a result, he tries to persuade Ammu to agree to Mr. Hollick's proposal, that Ammu be "sent to his bungalow to be 'looked after'" (41). Ammu says nothing, which only further infuriates her husband and leads to physical violence, a pattern that continues to repeat itself.

Ammu suffers at the hands of both the white man and the black man who objectify her and reduce her to market value. Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, tells us that: "When Blacks make contact with the white world a certain sensitizing action takes place. If the psychic

structure is fragile, we observe a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an *actional* personal...only “the Other” can enhance his status” (132). In this context, then, Ammu’s husband, like Pappachi, suffers from an inferiority complex, “assimilation madness” and resorts to violence and alcohol as an escape from his reality. He wishes to “enhance” his and his family’s status and life, “viewed practically, in the long run it was a proposition that would benefit both of them, he said. In fact, all of them, if they considered the children’s education” (Roy 41). Psychologically, socially, and economically, Ammu’s husband feels inferior and unable to keep up in the white man’s world. For characters like Ammu, escaping both men and the ideologies they subscribe to, is nearly impossible. Ammu’s fate as a ‘madwoman’ and her impending death come as no surprise – there is no way out.

Hierarchical Relations: the Caste System

The caste system functions as a rigid set of dichotomies, the most obvious of which is: Touchable/Untouchable. This distinction follows the same rigidly set racial boundaries and gender separation binaries: White/Black, male/female, British/Indian, British woman/Indian woman, and an endless list of constructed distinctions. In *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Nicholas Dirks holds the view that colonialism and the caste system played off each other; both systems reflected the same social, religious and political injustices. Dirks argues that “caste is a modern phenomenon, that is, specifically, the product of an historical encounter between India and Western colonial rule” (5). Dirks does not mean to suggest that the caste system was born from British colonialism or that it is merely a product of colonization. Dirks emphasizes:

I am suggesting that it was under the British that ‘caste’ became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all ‘systemizing’ India’s diverse forms of social

identity, community, and organization. This was achieved through an identifiable (if contested) ideological canon as the result of a concrete encounter with colonial modernity during two hundred years of British domination (5).

What Roy's exposure of the caste system does is imply that the caste system is not separate from British colonial rule, is not merely an Indian concept, and does not stand for Indian society in its diverse workings. Roy's text identifies the caste system as an invention developed within Indian culture and society, as specifically a symbol for Indian culture that British colonization had constructed. In a sense, the caste system had become synonymous with India as a whole, and it has had a homogenizing effect. Pre-colonial India had sustained heterogeneous identities and different significances attached to social identities and groups, collectivities. With British rule, came a certain Orientalist presumed knowledge and ways of systemizing and categorizing. Dirks historicizes the rise of the interest in the caste system:

British interest in the institution of caste intensified in very new ways. District level manuals and gazetteers began to devote whole chapters to the ethnography of caste and custom; imperial surveys made caste into a central object of investigation; and by the time of the first decennial census of 1872, caste had become the primary subject of social classification and knowledge (15).

Given the way by which the caste system has become a governing trope of Indian culture and society, Roy takes that theme and intertwines it with all other forms of oppression. For her, such institutionalized violence is multifaceted and not easily defined. In fact, nothing in Roy's novel is clear-cut and unquestionable. That is the very essence of the novel, its multiple narratives, and its non-linear plot, its constant revisions of dichotomies and attempts at deconstructing previously held notions of India, East and West, male and female, private and public politics.

The caste system in *The God of Small Things* plays a significant part in the Ipe family's downfall, in the children's traumatized selves, and their mother's as well as Velutha's death. The positioning of the caste system as a central theme in the novel is not meant to dehumanize or demoralize India, or to appeal to a Western model of superiority/inferiority, but rather it questions the distinction between Eastern and Western modes of oppression. In *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things* Alex Tickell informs us that the Hindu reformer Swami Vivekananda referred to the caste system as "a mad-house" (27). Because the caste system further perpetuated social and class madness, Ammu and Velutha are victims of society's madness. In a mad society, one that is infested with patriarchal oppression, colonial values, what choice is there but for madness to emerge as a result of unreasonable laws? Tickell historicizes the caste system's emergence in India: "The caste system or *caturvarna* (literally, four colours) is an ancient four-part division of Hindu society that arranges the human world in the context of a sociocosmic order (*dharma*) that existed from the time of creation (22). The caste system was not simply a division of humanity, of social classes, but it dictated and entailed social duties and socioeconomic positioning on the social ladder: "As a *paravan*, Velutha in *The God of Small Things* belongs to this stigmatized 'untouchable' group, and it is this fact that makes his affair with Ammu – and their mutual erotic 'touching' – such a transgressive act (23). Velutha's transgression is not only in his familiar to perform his social identity, like Ammu's failure to perform as the "good woman/mother" but also it is his alleged failure to abide to social regulations and the power of society against the individual. Roy's text stresses the role of the public politics and the public domain in regulating and controlling the individual's private domain.

Having used the trope of the caste system in a postcolonial novel, Roy carries the burden of representing and presenting India through her writing, ostensibly without falling into the trap of homogenizing an entire nation as one category. Yet Roy is able to equate the caste system with racial and sexual politics. The characters do not suffer only from the caste system's injustices and oppressions, but rather they are controlled subjects, always under multiple sites of oppression and assimilation. Tickell suggests that the caste system was formulated in a way to stand in opposition to Western ideas of progression and equality:

The word 'caste' derives from the Portuguese *casta*, meaning pure or unadulterated (sharing a Latin root with the word 'chaste'), and its European etymology should immediately make us suspicious of definitions of 'caste' that rely exclusively on ideas of purity and defilement...one of the defining studies of caste, Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1967) sees the opposition between purity and pollution as a central figure of caste hierarchies. However, more recently sociologists have criticized Dumont's model, arguing that it repeats forms of colonial thought that 'essentialised' and fixed Indian society around a specific, historically static concept, thus presenting India as the reverse mirror image of a 'rational', progressive and enlightened Europe (25).

It is this very distinction between East and West that Roy challenges and questions. It is this very dichotomy, this border between purity and pollution, cleanliness and defilement, that the text seeks to interrogate through its seeming celebration of transgression and madness, of border-crossing and blurring of boundaries, whether physical, social, or mental.

Yet colonization in itself is a form of madness, assimilation is a form of blurring and reforming one's identity in order to be accepted by the Western other, patriarchy fosters oppressive regimes to avoid the cultivation of bad/mad women – as such, the “mad-house” is

everywhere, and Roy's text provides a closer look at all the madness that public politics breeds. Roy's text questions the so-called truths and ideologies that have long been held intact. Michel Foucault, in "Truth and Power" emphasizes the power of knowledge and discourse in creating and dispersing truth:

Truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of that: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true (1668).

By presenting and representing the caste system as synonymous with Western racial and class distinctions, by re-envisaging the harm done to the subalternized minorities (women, untouchables, hybrid children), Roy's *The God of Small Things* reformulates conceptions and misconceptions, Eastern and Western truths and ideologies.

Subalternity and Madness in Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Positioning Roy as an author who attempts to speak for minority groups and different Indian women in this text is slightly problematic, especially in light of Gayatri Spivak's interrogations of subalternity and voice. By drawing on *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* I would argue that Spivak might view Roy as a member of the "Indian elite... native informants for first-world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other" (270). Yet Spivak also maintains that the "colonised subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous" (270). Roy's characters fall into different social classes, and most notably, the Subaltern subject, Velutha, also shares a certain commonality with Ammu, also considered oppressed because of her gender and not her social class. In a sense, Ammu is a true gendered female subaltern, yet Roy presents Velutha as classically subaltern – Untouchable -- in the text. In regards to the formulation of the subaltern,

and who may be considered “truly” subaltern, Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* addresses the issue as follows:

It is not the case that only the very lowliest of the low can be understood as ‘true’ subalterns, worth of being ‘recovered.’ At the same time, we should keep in mind that those who, following Gramsci, revived the term ‘subaltern’ in historical studies, did so in order to draw distinctions *within* colonised peoples, between the elite and the non-elite. But whoever our subalterns are, they are positioned simultaneously within several different discourses of power and of resistance... This suggests that any instance of agency, or act of rebellion, can be assessed from divergent perspectives (199).

By following Loomba’s argument and her insistence on the flexibility of the term subaltern, we can infer that Roy’s pairing of Ammu/Velutha is a method that opens a discussion of subalternity and its boundaries and definitions. In Roy’s text, nothing is fixed or follows a clear definition.

Ammu and Velutha are both excluded from society, they are both the subaltern, the abject. He is an Untouchable male, while she is a female from a higher social class. This pairing is similar to Catherine and Heathcliff’s love affair in *Wuthering Heights*. Ammu and Catherine are both female protagonists who choose to love someone from a different social class –and they both die because of the separation, from Velutha, and from Heathcliff. Both Ammu and Catherine cannot handle society’s violent separation of them from their lovers, and the trauma writes itself on both their psyches and bodies. The dichotomies of male/female, master/slave, touchable/untouchable are all at play. To cross into forbidden territory, all dichotomies must be dismantled and borders and boundaries must be transgressed –and that is exactly where the God of small things, rather than big things, appears. Velutha and this forbidden affair represent all that is minor, small, unseen, unaccepted, unheard of, excluded, abjected from society (both the

private and the public spheres). In Ammu's dream, he is the "one-armed man...the God of Loss...the God of Small Things" who is only able to do one thing at a time, unable to keep up, "if he fought he couldn't win" (207). Even in Ammu's dream, he is physically disabled, unable to fit in, unacceptable to society's norms and what is considered a "normal" body. In her dream, his physical disability mirrors the stigma he faces every day, being an Untouchable. Ammu's dream is symbolic and creates a backdrop for interrogating all that is normalized and devalued by society, everything that is abjected, everything that is unaccepted and excluded. Ammu and Velutha's affair demands that the binaries that society attempts to maintain and keep intact, are to be demolished and replaced by new modes of thought. The consequences are of course, devastating, and the repercussions are traumatic; yet the children (especially Rahel) are able to follow their mother's rebellious path. She is not submissive, and refuses to adhere to strict codes of social conduct, both publicly and privately. Ammu's affair with Velutha, once revealed, becomes a public issue, and she is enraged and still attempts to fight the public domain. Ammu is first locked in the house, (like all mad female protagonists) in her bedroom, "like a family lunatic in a medieval household" (239). She is labelled as mad, and the novel ends with both Ammu and Velutha's deaths. Roy raises the subaltern's voice, yet the novel ends with the protagonists' deaths.

Spivak, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, recognizes that literature is a form of representation that is not as constricting as other forms of discourse and representations, as long as we remain aware of its status as a fiction and hence its ability to convey without 'representing' as in 'standing in for', a substitution that can cause political harm. Spivak asserts that there are "two senses of representation...representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy" (256). Unlike those representations by historians

and political activists that may appear to convey ‘the truth’ of a subject unproblematically, aesthetic representation offers the possibility of something of the subject getting across without a dangerous substitution taking place. Spivak is wary of essentialising the subaltern, of romanticizing the subaltern, and of perpetuating more Western discourse of otherness. Spivak poses difficult questions: “How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?” (272-73). Granted, Roy as the author, speaking from her subject-position, does rewrite and reformulate a truth. She produces more than one truth, in fact, the multiplicity of her narrative clearly engages with multiple truths. Roy’s text attempts to question stories, events, personal and public narratives, different truths, and histories. Meaning in itself is questioned:

Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story. Still, to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem is only one way of looking at it. Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendency....It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like a tea from a teabag. That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. That laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much. (32-3)

The beginnings of stories of suffering and oppression lie long in the past and are multiple; the constant is the regulation of love and desire as central to operations of power. Roy’s *The God of Small Things* inquires about truths and discourses, history and repercussions, institutions and power. Roy asserts that there is more than one way of considering the way things fell apart, the way things really began (if there is such a thing) and seems to shift between dominant

discourses, avoiding constructing her own singular vision of the “truth.” As Spivak reminds us: “A Foucauldian or...deconstructive position would oblige us to admit that ‘truths’ are constructions as well, and that we cannot avoid producing them” (*In Other Worlds*, 340). There is a sense that Roy produces her own truths, by articulating different views, attaching meaning to historical events and re-addressing common tropes in literature. Yet the epigraph of the text comes from John Berger, stating “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one.” This choice of quotation is by no means arbitrary. Multiple perspectives and multiple narratives are integral to the build-up of the text, to its goal of defeating the “big God” and the big “History” as well as other centred terms. There is an attempt at considering “little events, ordinary things” in relation to the larger, dominant History (Roy 32). By considering the smaller events, the smaller things, little events and little histories, smaller lives, private lives are set up against the public sphere. This is the main line of thought in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*: an examination of all that is blurry and transgressive, all that society seeks to control and regulate, and a questioning of so-called boundaries and borders: “Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End” (5). In *The God of Small Things*, everything is questioned, contested, and challenged. New meanings are formed, new truths are offered, and a re-writing of madness in the postcolonial novel.

Madness in the postcolonial context, and madness as a common trope produced by colonies, is not a new area that Roy’s text claims to discover. In fact, madness in the colonies resonates with such canonical touchstones as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, as Kurtz eventually goes mad. The entire novel revolves around Kurtz's contact with the 'dark' and 'grotesque' Africa, which has ultimately driven him to insanity, a state of being where there is no

return. At the end of the novel, Kurtz utters the infamous words: "The horror! The horror!" Those very words seem to diagnose the condition of the nation as well as the individual who comes into contact with the "other." Stephen Clingman's "Beyond the Limit: The Social Relations of Madness in Southern African Fiction" poses the question of madness in colonial and postcolonial works of literature. He claims that the theme of madness is found in "two founding texts of the colonial era" which are *Heart of Darkness* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (232). Clingman views this intersection of madness and the colonial experience as non-coincidental: "Even the narrative framing of the novel [*Heart of Darkness*] mimes this sense of danger, as the text proceeds (analogically) to deeper and deeper levels and more interior modes, where fact and fantasy mingle licentiously" (232). He asserts that the "theme of madness does seem to be connected with colonial history and is revealed as such in fiction" (233). Roy's text reveals the idea of madness and links its emergence to the larger picture, to the larger History. It is not as though there is a projected blaming of the West, simply, for "causing" madness. There are a multitude of reasons and meanings which Roy's text reiterates. Clingman is wary of oversimplifying the equation of racism and madness, careful not to state that racism/colonialism breeds insanity: "Racism, like madness, should also be seen as an *effect* of the colonial or apartheid situation, and not simply as an all-encompassing cause" (243). Hence the social relations and contact between coloniser/colonised helped foster relations of limits and delimitations, of "traditions of mastery and control. Implicitly and explicitly this involved the setting up of boundaries...as well as inventing traditions of control, dialectical consistency meant that traditions of *subordination*, too, needed to be invented" (248). Likewise, Roy's dismantling of binaries and continuous interrogation of these traditions of domination serve as ways of reconfiguring madness in the colonial/postcolonial context. Madness is repeatedly mentioned in

the text as a threatening force, yet also liberating: “Madness slunk in through a chink in History” (204), “Ammu worried about madness” (213) and “There was madness there that morning” (224).

But perhaps Roy’s most significant attempt at re-writing madness in a colonial/postcolonial context is her reemployment of the very image of Kurtz and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Roy uses the image of Kurtz to suggest that colonialism affects both coloniser and colonised. The allusion is as follows:

Kari Saipu’s house. The Black Sahib. The Englishman who had ‘gone native.’ Who spoke Malayalam and wore mundus. Ayemenem’s own Kurtz. Ayemenem his private Heart of Darkness. He had shot himself through the head ten years ago, when his young lover’s parents had taken the boy away from him...The house had lain empty for years.

Very few people had seen it. But the twins could picture it. The History House (51).

Kari Saipu’s house, the History House, represents all the love laws, all the sanctions, all the rules and regulations, yet simultaneously, it represents transgression, madness, and most obviously, History. It represents one way of looking at things, one big History rather than small histories. It symbolizes history’s discourse and power. The implementation of the image of Kurtz, going “native,” is yet another way that Roy uses already established and constructed ideas and discourse, deconstructs those ideas, and critiques them from within that very same image. Kari Saipu is a transgressive figure who engages in a taboo relationship with a young boy – but that is all the narrator reveals; there are no elaborations on the details of that relationship. By presenting the Englishman as a sort of sexual predator, Roy manages to interrogate the Western superior self-image, supposedly based on morality, while its Eastern other carries connotations of immorality, and unrestrained sexualities. There is also an envisaging of colonial sexual contact

and sexual relations, yet this time, it is the Kurtz/Kari figure whose colonization/penetration of Africa/India is reiterated in Kari's homosexual and paedophilic relation with the boy. Loomba reminds us that in colonial writings as well as travel writings, "non-Europeans, especially women, are repeatedly constructed as libidinally excessive, and sexually uncontrolled...Non-European peoples were imagined as more easily given to same-sex relationships" (131). In contradiction to this assumption, Roy represents the figure of the European male as transgressive in nature, and his relationship with the boy is set up to be disturbing. This time, the "primitive" is not equated to "blackness." Loomba states: "We should not forget that colonial sexual encounters, both heterosexual and homosexual, often exploited inequities of class, age, gender, race and power" (134). The boy's parents take him away from Kari and this event leads to Kari's suicide. There is a sense of re-claiming taking place, a feeling of being returned, taken away from colonial/sexual contact, as the boy is "sent to school" (Roy 51). We are not informed whether the boy had any say in the matter, but Kari's suicide is a tragic event which continues to haunt Ayemenem. The coloniser is not really dead, is not really gone, and there is a lingering effect that the History House leaves behind, as colonialism has left its mark forever in history.

Small histories Versus History

The God of Small Things is preoccupied with smaller lives against the backdrop of bigger lives, smaller histories in relation to the large, supposedly singular History. As such, family history is integral to the plot as well as upholding social hierarchies. It is Mammachi and Baby Kochamma who plot against Ammu, in order to cleanse their family honour from the great crime she has committed, her affair with an Untouchable. It is Chacko, Ammu's brother, who reminds her that being a divorced woman means she is a burden that the family must carry. It is Pappachi, Ammu's father, who instils terror in his household. In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock

suggests that the concept of family as a category of colonial management and race-typing emerged after 1859, when “the welter of distinctions of race, class and gender were gathered into a single narrative by the image of the Family of man” (44). She maintains that as the social function of “great service families invested in filiative rituals of patrilineal rank and subordination” was extended, the power of the family as a trope strengthened (45):

The filiative (familial) order...did not disappear. Rather, it floured as a metaphoric afterimage, reinvented within the new orders of the industrial bureaucracy, nationalism and colonialism...The family offered an indispensable figure for sanctioning social hierarchy...Because the subordination of woman to man and child to adult were deemed natural facts, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social *difference* as a category of nature (45).

The structure and private politics of the family mirrored the larger public politics, Europe took on the role of the “father” and as a result, the colonies were feminized, made inferior, subordinates, to be educated and reformed. McClintock states: “The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial thus depended on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children” (45). In Roy’s text, social hierarchies and caste systems are two forms of oppressive violence that are deployed mainly against the subaltern, minorities, and children. Rahel and Estha’s traumatic childhood is the result of multiple systems of oppression and both familial and institutional violence. In *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, Ranjana Khanna notes that epistemic violence continues to haunt the colonised, the subaltern, and there remains always an “uneasy relationship to the past as there is an attempt to assimilate it to the present and to the future” (247). Roy’s characters must negotiate their traumatic past with their present and future; sifting between time periods, the text attempts to

play out the tensions that arise from a constant haunting of the past. Khanna defines epistemic violence as “a kind of trauma linked to mourning, because it is marked by an entry that carries the subaltern forward, but leaves something behind that cannot be defined as consciousness as such” while also creating “phantoms that haunt the subaltern (perhaps made up of exclusions that have shaped this spectral existence) and that may be carried into civil society” (247). Khanna also notes the difficulty or, as she puts it, the “impossibility” of “the psychic assimilation of the past into the present...[which] creates a critical response to the present because of the way in which the past haunts it” (248). Roy’s characters, specifically Rahel and Estha, have suffered from colonialism, psychic and physical violence, and a traumatized past which becomes a phantom, always on the sidelines, always a shadow that continues to haunt, trouble, and regenerate pain. Khanna considers the idea of the phantom: “What is a phantom? What is a secret? A phantom constitutes a transgenerationally transmitted signifier of repression. It originates in a trauma or a repressed secret that has not been introjected, but rather, has been incorporated –swallowed whole rather than psychically assimilated” (255). In Roy’s texts, the characters suffer from a failure “psychically” to “assimilate” and work through the multiple traumas and phantoms that continue to threaten their sense of self, boundaries, and identities. Past traumas continue to play out in their memories, in their thoughts, in everyday details, and the colonial past is a larger lived experience which looms over the smaller details, the small things.

Bildungsroman and Mother/Daughter Relationships

Because the narrative is told from the point of view of a child, the text engages with the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. The novel’s focus is on the past and present, on Rahel and Estha’s childhood and adulthood. The characters are somewhat suspended between the past and

present, between being children and adults, between conflict and resolution, trauma and healing, bitterness and forgiveness. The novel is narrated in the third-person, rather than the usual first person narrative, a characteristic of the traditional genre. The children's struggle for personal reconciliation with their history and their past traumas is a necessary constituent of their spiritual awakening/healing. Mullaney, in *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*, concludes that the twins, Rahel and Estha, are "Frozen in the past. Rahel and Estha have never really grown up" (45). Mullaney's study also considers the significance of the child/children's point of view in light of the personal as well as socio-political tensions within the text:

Roy chooses to narrate her tale partially through the child's eye point of view, which allows her to tell her story from both sides of the divide –from inside and outside the dominant matrix, through an examination of the ways in which the child receives, molds and is molded by the values, beliefs, ways of doing and being handed down by the adults in their world (26).

Most useful for this chapter is Stella Bolaki's *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* and her discussion of the *topos* of the mother-daughter relationship and its manifestations in postcolonial fiction and coming-of-age narratives. Bolaki examines common tropes in the female *Bildungsroman* of contemporary ethnic American female writers. Bolaki refers to Jamaica Kincaid's *At the Bottom of the River* and *Lucy*. Both texts, she proposes, are concerned with a female sense of agency and identity-formation, "conjured by different forms of mobility and agency" (32). The relationship between mother-daughter, pitting daughter against mother, is not purely a personal conflict, but as Bolaki puts it, it "cannot be detached from the history of British colonialism in the Caribbean and the powers of neocolonialism in America" (32). Similarly, Rahel's (and Estha's) relationship with Ammu, can be read as suggestive of the

colonial/postcolonial relations between the mother land, India, and the imposition of supposed adulthood, a postcolonial/neocolonial state of being. The focus on achieving and forming a sense of identity that is separate from the mother, yet simultaneously tied to the past, to the mother, is one of the recurring themes in *The God of Small Things*. For Bolaki, however, the repetition of trauma and the resurfacing of traumatic memories in the present, the interplay between past and present, the lack of traditional “progress” or “closure” is not “pathological and counter-productive” (33). The re-enactment of trauma and traumatic memories, the reappearance of the past, can be productive, and is, in fact, a form of resistance to “dominant ideologies of American *Bildung*” (33). Roy’s *The God of Small Things* attempts to resist all traditions, rules, and “dominant ideologies”; as it rewrites rigid categories and definitions, anything and everything that is socially constructed.

The motherland, India, and the mother figure, Ammu, are always at war with the Law of the Father and colonial/patriarchal rule. Since Rahel and Estha are raised primarily by their mother, Ammu, they do not have a father figure in their lives – the closest is their Uncle, Chacko, who prefers his own daughter, Sophie Mol, the offspring of his marriage to the British Margaret Kochamma. The mother figure, Ammu, is their sense of home, security, safety, and the familiar. Ammu as the mother figure is symbolic of the motherland, the untainted land *before* colonization, before any Father figure entered the picture to control and implement laws. McClintock suggests that the colonised land has always been associated with the female body, the virgin land: “Symbolically reduced, in male eyes, to the space on which male contests are waged, women experience particular difficulties laying claim to alternative genealogies...regulated to a realm beyond history...lying, by definition, outside the male contests over land, money, and political power” (31). Ammu’s refusal to adhere to male power,

society's rejection of her, and her powerlessness within a male-dominated, patriarchal society, leaves her in a constant struggle, and this obviously affects Rahel and Estha. If, symbolically, she is the motherland, then Chacko (the closest the twins have to a father figure) represents power, colonization and neocolonization, and most significantly, public politics and discourse. Ammu reminds her children to behave, at all times, especially when they meet Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol. Baby Kochamma, the twins' grand-aunt, reproaches Ammu's ways with her children, and states: "They're sly. They're uncouth. Deceitful. They're growing wild. You can't manage them" (142). The children almost sound primitive, uneducated, uncivilized, and these descriptions of children of the motherland, children of India, who are not following the Law of the Father, are not regulated and controlled by colonial/Western definitions of civility and morality, struggle to prove to the rest of the family (and the public sphere) their worthiness. Ammu, aware of her children's otherness and the way society rejects them, explains to Rahel and Estha that "Everybody says that children need a Baba. And I say no. Not *my* children" (142). She reminds them that she loves them "more than Double", she is both the mother and the father, and that if/when they "disobey" her in "Public, *everybody* gets the wrong impression" (142). Ammu places great emphasis on how her children behave in public. They do not need a father figure, they do not need the Law of the Father, the law of the coloniser, and the laws of institutions. The mother, the motherland, can handle and educate her own children, her own citizens, without the supposed "help" of anyone else. Chacko claims to protect the children from their mother's ways by reminding her that she strips them of their rights, and that "it's fascist, the way you treat them" (81). Ammu, ironically, responds with the following: "Stop posing as the children's Great Saviour!...When it comes down to brass tacks, you don't give a damn about them. Or me" (82).

Chacko, like the British coloniser, the imperialist, the middle-man, “poses” as the Saviour, as Ammu so aptly describes it.

Rahel’s relationship with her mother is ambivalent, it is not simply a loving one; there are multiple tensions between them, and there is a sense of merging with the mother too. This happens when Rahel (and Estha) are adults, and return to their family home: “Gentle half-moons have gathered under their eyes and they are as old as Ammu was when she died. Thirty-one. Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age” (5). Rahel has become very similar to her mother. Rahel is aware that “perhaps Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors” (31). Like Ammu’s transgressive affair with Velutha, Rahel initiates an incestuous episode with Estha. She had her mother’s mouth, as Estha observes, “their beautiful mother’s mouth” (284). Also like her mother, Rahel returns to Ayemenem divorced. Rahel looks up to Ammu, demands her mother’s attention, and at the same time, the relationship is fraught with tensions: “sometimes she was the most beautiful woman that Estha and Rahel had ever seen. And sometimes she wasn’t” (44). At times, Ammu is especially strict and stern with Rahel, because Rahel, like her mother, and with the naivety of a child, speaks her mind too often, without censoring her thoughts. Two examples from the text are most apt in clarifying this argument. The first takes place at Pappachi’s funeral (Rahel’s grandfather, Ammu’s father), and because the funeral is a new experience for Rahel, she asks her grandmother whether “after Mammachi died, she could inherit the pipette. Ammu took her out of the room and smacked her” (49). Ammu reprimands her daughter, but is also very wounded by Rahel’s insensitivity when she suggests that her mother marry the Orangedrink Lemondrink man at the cinema, who molests Estha. Of course both Ammu and Rahel are unaware of what had happened to Estha, and Rahel suggests that, since the man is, according to

Ammu, a “sweet chap”, then she should marry him (106). The following passage conveys the tension between them:

‘Rahel,’ Ammu said.

Rahel froze. She was desperately sorry for what she had said. She didn’t know where those words had come from. She didn’t know that she’d had them in her. But they were out now, and wouldn’t go back...

‘Rahel,’ Ammu said, ‘do you realize what you have just done?’

Frightened eyes and a fountain looked back at Ammu.

‘It’s all right. Don’t be scared,’ Ammu said. ‘Just answer me. Do you?’

‘What?’ Rahel said in the smallest voice she had...

‘D’you know what happens when you hurt people?’ Ammu said. ‘When you hurt people, they begin to love you less. That’s what careless words do. They make people love you a little less.’ (107)

Rahel’s mind comprehends Ammu’s words, but can only fathom that “a little less her Ammu loved her” (107). Unsurprisingly, it is mostly Rahel who is told to behave; she is the one who spots Velutha marching with the Marxist Labour Union, and screams his name. Ammu, afraid for Velutha, tells her daughter to “shut up” and Rahel notices that “Ammu had a film of perspiration on her forehead and upper lip, and that her eyes had become hard, like marbles” (69). Both mother and daughter struggle to understand the other, despite their infinite love for each other.

The mother figure is almost always, unquestionably, linked to the motherland. Bolaki’s *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* considers the mother figure in Caribbean literature, but I find her arguments relevant for colonial India too. She identifies the positioning of the mother as linked

to the land in two disparate aspects: “the mother figure is conflated with the land and becomes symbolic not only of the native land (the Caribbean), but also of the colonial mother country (England). The ambiguity of the maternal voice is a recurring anxiety in Kincaid’s work” (48). By analogy, Bolaki’s argument works for Ammu’s relationship with Rahel and Estha, as she represents both the native land, India, and the new “colonial mother country (England).” Bolaki finds that there is a sort of “double or simultaneous movement that registers both attraction and resistance to the mother/land and her tongue” (48). Ammu and Rahel’s relationship is primarily based on Ammu’s attempt at educating Rahel, reminding her how to behave properly, especially when Rahel or Estha transgresses the boundaries of acceptable social conduct, for instance upon the arrival of their cousin, Sophie Mol (the daughter of Chacko and his English ex-wife, Margaret Kochamma) to India, they both embarrassed Ammu with their lack of social etiquette. Ammu attempts to educate them and socialize them, even as she resorts to threatening the twins: “‘If you ever,’ Ammu said, ‘and I mean this, EVER, ever again disobey me in Public, I will see it to that you are sent away to somewhere you will jolly well learn to behave. Is that clear?’” (141).

As Ammu is the mother figure, her role is to see to it that the children follow society’s rules and expectations, but at the same time, she sets the stage for transgressions; it is her wild and rebellious nature against the public sphere, which in turn gets passed down to Rahel. Bolaki states that this “double or simultaneous movement” is apparent in one of the stories in Kincaid’s *At the Bottom of the River*, “Girl.” In that short story, Bolaki tells us, “the mother instils patriarchal and colonial values in her daughter, thus identifying with the colonisers... but also shows her ways of performing transgressions” (49). In the same vein, Roy’s Ammu unknowingly “shows” Rahel (and Estha) “ways of performing transgressions.” Like her mother, Rahel ends

up divorced and as such, an outsider in society, even more disavowed than when she had been a child, a hybrid (Hindu and Syrian Christian), and belonging to a family of Anglophiles. As the narrative progresses, the personal and public transgressions multiply; the twins grow up as hybridized, traumatized, and disavowed – not to mention Estha’s descent into madness, the principal issue to which I shall return shortly when I read Estha as Rahel’s double.

Rahel and Ammu have a very intense relationship. The mother-daughter dyad is especially complex in postcolonial narratives. Victoria Burrows, in *Whiteness and Trauma*, discusses the mother-daughter relationship in the work of Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison. Most useful for this chapter, however, is her identification and labelling of the mother-daughter relationship as “an essentially ambivalent alliance” (3). Burrows is interested in emotional ties, in knots: “Knots bind one to one’s history –individual and collective” (2). Knots need “unravelling” and “analysing historical, socio-cultural and maternal genealogies that shape female subjectivity” (2). Burrows asserts that mother-daughter relationships are “often infused not just with love, joy and sharing of identities, but also aggression, ambivalence and even hate...Indeed, it can be argued that the mother-daughter dynamic is the most ambivalent of all woman-to-woman relationships” (3). Rahel’s immense love and adoration of her mother are transformed into a bitter anger. This happens after Velutha’s murder, and Ammu’s spiral downwards into emotional, mental, and physical instability. Ammu becomes detached from reality, from any sense of belonging to family, and her sadness leaves her unable to cope with life. As she resorts to drinking, Mammachi, Rahel’s grandmother, asks her to “visit Rahel as seldom as possible” (Roy 153). Rahel is unable to deal with her feelings of anger, bitterness, and most importantly, a child’s pain and loneliness after the loss of Estha, who had been sent away to live with his father, and Ammu, who had also left the family home. Rahel feels disconnected

from her mother: “She hated her mother then. *Hated* her” (Roy 153). Because postcolonial narratives mostly deal with tensions between the colonised and the “mother land” there is also an always never-ending struggle to remain at home, psychologically and emotionally, but at the same time, a sense of departure from the “mother land” must happen as assimilation enters the picture and the colonised people try to accommodate the new rule; the new colonised land. Assimilation madness emerges as a result of the multiple tensions between past and present, and a separation from the “mother land.” As Burrow aptly puts it: “In the context of postcolonial theory, fictionalized mother-daughter relationships also provide an important space for a critical re-reading of the familiar colonial trope of the family and its tensions allegorized as the nation, and imperial powers as mothers of their colonised children” (10). The Ipe family in *The God of Small Things* is especially significant in its position as an assimilated family. As Chacko puts it, “they were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away” (Roy 51). They are constantly at war with their identities, histories, and the “mother land.” Mother-daughter relationships in *The God of Small Things* span more than one generation; and there is tension amongst them all, an always in-between area, mediating on negotiating a sense of self away from the mother, the “mother land” and the new colonial and neocolonial rules.

There are certain expectations of motherhood and what it means to be a mother in a society which also undermines women and places them as inferior to men (black men and white men). Both Western and Eastern critics have explored these unbearable expectations. Jane Ussher’s *The Madness of Women* reiterates that society places “high and unrealistic expectations of motherhood” (26). These “idealized cultural constructions of motherhood, internalized by women, are also influential” (26). Simone De Beauvoir articulates this double-positioning of

women: “It is outrageously paradoxical to deny woman all activity in public affairs, to shut her out of masculine careers, to assert her incapacity in all fields of effort, and then to entrust her the most delicate and the most serious undertaking of all: the moulding of a human being” (539). De Beauvoir’s argument concerns Western ideologies and the way patriarchy attempted to place women in conflicting positions of subjectivity, power and powerlessness. In a similar vein, Amina Mama’s “Sheroes and Villains” argues against this burden placed on African women, who must internalize both Western and Eastern ideologies of what it means to be a woman and a mother. Mama argues:

Postcolonial national ideologies continue to call upon women to play a circumscribed role: this time as Mothers of the Nation...the mass ‘promotion’ of women to mere wives and mothers, in an economic climate that compels women to engage in all forms of work outside the home, and often to entire households...In addition to the public victimization of women by postcolonial regimes, there is also a high tolerance of domestic violence (261).

Similarly to Beauvoir, Mama problematizes this hypocritical and burdening positionality of women, a position that renders them both powerful and powerless, as ‘mothers of the nation’ and yet leaves them as victims of oppressive regimes. Ammu suffers from this double-positioning of women and is left with conflicting expectations of motherhood and womanhood. Roy’s text exemplifies this “umixable mix” in Ammu’s characterization as both mother and woman, mother and rebel, subject and object, active agent and passive. Because Ammu is a mother, she is expected to behave in certain ways, and yet, there is an underlying tone that seems to tell us that she was not meant to be one, that motherhood was somehow thrust upon her: “Ammu loved her children (of course) but their...willingness to love people who didn’t really love them

exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them – just as an education, a protection” (42). Ammu is constantly dealing with the repercussions of her decision to marry *and* divorce a Bengali. Because of his alcoholism and violence, Ammu leaves him and takes her children with her, going back to her family’s home, “to everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams” (42). Ammu’s dreams of a life away from her father’s tyranny and her mother’s helplessness are forever demolished as she must return home with two twins and the burden of a label of a divorced woman.

Ammu’s ‘Madness’

Ammu, having no “Locusts Stand I” or no legal standing as a woman, suffers the consequences of her divorce and her affair/relationship with Velutha. She is labelled as mad and dangerous, and unfit to be a mother to her twins. Choosing to enter into a transgressive relationship with the Untouchable, rather than the white man (although she previously had the chance to), positions her at a disadvantage, to say the least. She becomes dehumanized and expelled from her family home and from society. Both the private and the public spheres reject her, attempt to discipline her, and ultimately, triumph over her, culminating in her death. Most importantly, it is Ammu’s family that shuns her first, before society does. In “Class, Gender and Family System: The Case of George Sand,” Wendy Deutelbaum and Cynthia Huff examine the family structure and its effect on the individual, specifically women. They consider the “cultural creation *woman*” and the confining of women in domestic and private spheres, “to their roles as reproducers and domestic labourers and effectively excluding them from any more active participation in society” (263). Deutelbaum and Huff are interested in “how the family itself acts out the sexual, economic, and political conflicts patriarchal society as a whole refuses to resolve” (260). In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu suffers from a patriarchal and colonial society, as well

as her family's preoccupation with assimilation ("assimilation madness") and must negotiate her place within both the private and public domain. Gillian Rose, in "Women and Everyday Spaces", tells us that women's negotiation of space and their bodies is problematic, namely, "everyday space is not only self-evidently innocent, but also bound into various and diverse social and psychic dynamics of subjectivity and power" (365). Bodies must be negotiated in both private and public space; identities are contested and re-contested in different dichotomies of power. Ammu falls in-between the generations of Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, and her daughter Rahel. It is Ammu who most rebels against her family's rigid rules and hierarchical injustices, and simultaneously defies the public sphere, public institutions such as the police and the church, which govern and threaten to discipline those who transgress any social or religious boundaries. As a child, Ammu watches her abusive father constantly tyrannize over Mammachi and herself. She grows up very aware of the patriarchal oppression that exists both within the family institution and outside within the public domain. As such, her affair with Velutha may be read as a political statement, a revolutionary act that threatens the private and the public, the personal and the political, despite its subtlety and quietness.

Marriage further proves the inescapability of patriarchy; it is everywhere. Ammu's first rebellious act is in her choice of a husband. Ammu marries a Bengali (Estha and Rahel's father), transgressing the rules of nationality and class, and later divorces him. She becomes ostracized for having first, married a Bengali, and second, for being a divorcee with two children. The narrator sets up a description of Ammu as transgressive:

She smoked cigarettes...What was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? This air of unpredictability? It was that she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew

inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day (43-4).

Ammu must reconcile two very disparate forces within her and find equilibrium for herself that does not rob her of her identity *as Ammu*, rather than simply the twins' *mother*. Being a divorced mother of two, Ammu is forever frowned upon. The private domain and the family reject her, but also the public domain decides to stamp her as a failure, a "man-less woman" and a "woman they had already damned" (43). The public domain dictates and affects the way the private familial life functions; there is "the constant, high, whining mewl of local disapproval" (42). Ammu must face the way that the public domain scorns her and her choices, and by extension, her private life, her family life, and her identity are all affected. Not only is her identity as a divorced woman considered immoral and less than other women (she is a "wretched Man-less woman") but also, she is a mother of two unfortunate children from an "intercommunity love marriage" (45). Ammu's choices are dangerous, and what she does with her wedding ring is quite symbolic. The narrator informs us that after her divorce, Ammu "had her wedding ring melted down and made into a thin bangle with snake heads that she put away for Rahel" (43). The ring, which very clearly symbolizes patriarchy and traditions, is something that Ammu passes down to her daughter. The ring is transformed into "snake heads"; a symbol for transgression and a new tradition of defiance, which later manifests itself in Rahel's own interracial marriage and her incestuous relationship/night with Estha. Marriage no longer becomes a tradition of oppression, but rather a new tradition of defiance is implemented; the ring is no longer the symbol of patriarchal and domestic oppression, but rather, it is made into a ring of defiance and power.

Ammu passes down, unknowingly, the transgressive gene. Rahel, like her mother, does not subscribe to society's rules and patriarchy. Ammu's silence is also passed down to Rahel, for

Ammu “spoke to no one...and carried magic secrets in her eyes” while Rahel’s eyes “behaved as though they belonged to someone else. Someone watching” (43, 20). The idea of madness lurking is evident in Ammu’s anticipation of what people would say about her: “There was Ammu...Married a Bengali. Went quite mad. Died Young. In a cheap lodge somewhere” (213). Ammu’s predictions are accurate, for both during her life and after her death, she is considered bad, mad, and dangerous, unfathomable to everyone else.

Everyone was a little wary of her. They sensed somehow that she lived in the penumbral shadows between two worlds, just beyond the grasp of their power. That a woman they had already damned, now had time left to lose, and could therefore be dangerous...people avoided her, made little loops around her, because everybody agreed that it was best to just Let Her Be (44).

Given that she is already “damned” and dangerous, Ammu is already on the margins, already excluded from society, yet at the same time; her affair with Velutha threatens society as a whole. Like Catherine’s relationship with Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, Ammu’s choice to be with Velutha is transgressive. However, rather than threaten only the private sphere, Ammu’s affair with Velutha shakes the public sphere and institutional violence enters the picture to reprimand her and anyone else who dares to transgress. Ammu is faced with public, institutional violence at the police station. The policeman, the Station House Officer, physically and verbally harasses Ammu: “He said that the police...didn’t take statements from veshyas or their illegitimate children. Ammu said she’d see about that... Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap tap” (9). Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” is relevant to this institutional violence that takes place in Roy’s text. Althusser reminds us that there is a distinction between public and private domains of ideological “interpellation” and control:

State Apparatus contains: the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts...Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question ‘functions by violence’...the Repressive State Apparatus belongs entirely to the *public* domain, much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the private domain. Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families, some schools...etc., etc., are *private* (1489).

The police represent the Repressive State Apparatus, and the Inspector “knew exactly what he was doing...to humiliate and terrorize her [Ammu]. An attempt to instil order into a world gone wrong” (246). The police are also the ones who brutally murder Velutha, but not before physically torturing him: “His skull was fractured in three places...He had goosebumps where the handcuffs touched his skin” (294). Velutha, having dared to transgress public institutional law, specifically the caste system, is punished and abandoned by everyone in positions of power. The police’s institutional and physical violence towards Velutha is exemplified in the way by which he is referred to just as an object to be damaged, his battered body is “their work. Their Work, abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Woman and (in the hours to come) by Children, lay folded on the floor” (294). Nobody comes to Velutha’s aid, and even those who supposedly have very little power abandon him. Both the big things and the small things do not help his case against the Big God, the Repressive State, and society’s firm dichotomies of power relations. Velutha is unable to defend himself or Ammu, and he is killed by the Big God, the institutional forces.

Both Ammu and Velutha are viewed as deviant, insolent, and even mad in their actions (like Catherine and Heathcliff). In Ammu's case, as a woman, she suffers from patriarchal oppression and we are told that "she developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless

streak that develops into Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big" (172-73). Pappachi violently abused Mammachi and Ammu, which as a result instilled fear and rage within Ammu. This "Someone Small" symbolizes the private domestic sphere and its battle with "Someone Big", the public politics. Similarly to Velutha, Ammu is punished and rejected for daring to rebel against both the public and the private domain. First, her family punishes her by forcing her to send Estha away to his father, and second, she is forced to "pack her bags and leave. Because she had no Locusts Stand I. Because Chacko said she had destroyed enough already" (151). Upon leaving home, Ammu becomes very ill, "sick. Sad" (152). Physically, her body mirrors her inner state, her emotional and mental well-being. Not only is she considered "Wild" but also, her body changes, becoming that of an ailing person, "swollen with cortisone, moonfaced...each breath she took was like a war won against the steely fist that was trying to squeeze the air from her lungs" (153). Ammu is abjected from society, from family, and, like Catherine, her sudden illness eventually kills her. The church refuses to bury Ammu, "on several counts. So Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the electric crematory... The whole of her crammed into a little clay pot. Receipt No. Q 498673" (154-55). Even after her death, she is still punished by the State, by family, and therefore, even the memory of her is abjected, always carried around with Rahel, always haunting her.

Ammu is always the abject, the marginalized, and her body also suffers. Ammu's emotional and mental trauma of having "killed" Velutha manifests itself onto her body, leaving her ill, estranged, and even more ostracized and excluded from society (10). In *Critical Conditions: Illness and Disability in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Writing* Julie Ngué argues that in the postcolonial context, illness and disability are themes that are closely related to the idea of abjection. Postcolonial subjects, particularly female subjects/bodies,

live under “critical conditions...they all become, at one time or another, subject to exclusion and abjection” (12). Because these female subjects are positioned at the margins of society, they are constantly abjected, and their bodies, in turn, also become abjected and rejected from the binary of able/disabled. Ngue does not focus only on disabled subjects/bodies, but rather, she examines protagonists who suffer from what she terms “critical conditions” (11). Ngue states that “affect and psychic pain manifest themselves in the soma, on the skin, and deep within the muscles that tremble and shake...Such an interplay and *inextricability* of psyche and soma ultimately allows for a new conception of disability, or, as I term it, a state of “critical condition” in postcolonial contexts” (11). As such, what happens to Ammu, the postcolonial female subject, is a trauma, a trauma that results in illness, and ultimately, death. Ammu dies at thirty-one, “not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age” (Roy 154).

Public politics and the Repressive State apparatus, the caste system, patriarchy, are all factors that combine together to mark her body as abject, and label her as a ‘mad’ and dangerous woman. Ammu’s death, like Velutha’s, is unacknowledged by the public domain: “the sweeper found her in the morning” alone and tragically abjected, expelled from life itself. The night of Ammu’s death is especially significant, as we are told that she “had woken up at night to escape from a familiar, recurrent dream in which policemen approached her with snickering scissors, wanting to cut off her hair” (154). The trauma of Velutha’s death and her public humiliation, the verbal, emotional, and physical harassment she endures remain embedded in her memory and embodied in her ailing, suffering body. Ngue argues that the disabled or ill body threatens the boundaries of normativity and public space, and what comes out of the body “is necessarily shameful” in terms of bodily waste (126). These “notions of waste...challenge problematic binaries of order/disorder, purity/impurity, sacred/blasphemous, and finally, mental

ability/disability” (127). Before Ammu’s death, her body slowly disintegrates, and her presence begins to make everyone around her uncomfortable: “Over lunch she belched like a truck driver and said, “Excuse me,” in a deep, unnatural voice” and “coughed up a wad of phlegm into her handkerchief and showed it to Rahel” (153). Ammu’s body begins to deteriorate and function differently in the public sphere, it is as though her mental state of being ‘mad’ and defiant writes itself on her sick body, further ostracizing her and disturbing society’s definition of normalcy and “normal” bodies. Yet Ammu is aware of this rejection of her body, at least by her immediate family: “Ammu smiled at the silence around the table...She had an odd, feverish glitter in her eyes” (153). There is a sense of pleasure in reclaiming space, in disturbing the “norm” and social etiquette; Ammu’s presence threatens and disturbs boundaries and borders, and although she is no longer welcomed anywhere, she still retains her initial rebellious characteristics, and her desire never to be subjugated to colonial and patriarchal rules.

Ammu and Velutha’s affair is not simply a love affair written to please the audience. Brinda Bose discusses this inextricability of their private affair from public politics in her article “In Desire and Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*.” In the most intimate acts of love, crossing the boundaries of caste, namely, forbidden love, opens possibilities of rebellion and transgression that threaten the public space and public politics. Such small acts, by small gods, threaten the big God, the law of the Father, social norms and regulations, and the postcolonial State Apparatus. Ammu’s affair with Velutha is neither coincidental nor arbitrary; she makes a conscious choice, and it is that choice which ultimately ostracizes her and kills her. Her action is not purely a personal one, it is political in its most intimate details, for she manages to initiate an affair with the Untouchable, thereby shattering the social taboo and hierarchy that the Indian caste system maintains. Bose asserts that Ammu’s

desire for Velutha is not simply erotic or sexual, “it is through this shared raging that she finds it possible to desire the Untouchable...It is not only sexual gratification that she seeks; she seeks also to the touch Untouchable” (125). Velutha participates in a Marxist party, and as such, he is read as more of a political agent than Ammu is. Yet Bose urges us to reconsider the similarities between the two characters. Ammu and Velutha share the same rage, although different in circumstances and obvious class differences. Ammu, like Velutha, is abjected from society, always on the margins, always ostracized, frowned upon, and dismissed as either “mad” or dangerous. Ammu “attempts a subversion of caste/class rules as well as the male tendency to dominate, by being, necessarily, the initiator of the sexual act” (126). Ammu subverts the male/female dichotomy, the Master/slave dichotomy is blurred, and transgression paves the way for desire. Desire lends a political and social voice to both characters, and a sense of sexual agency arises to fulfil both Ammu and Velutha’s shared political visions. Bose suggests that to read Roy’s novel “*politically* one may need to accept that there are certain kinds of politics that have more to do with interpersonal relations than with grand revolutions, that the most personal dilemmas can also become public causes, that erotics can also be a politics” (129). However, Ammu’s individual politicized action does not necessarily represent a collective rebellion of all “repressed women...it is merely a substantiation of the many different kinds of politics that an individual may propose in response to ‘laws’ that are obviously culturally promulgated and sustained” (130). Ammu and Velutha’s affair becomes a national problem once it is discovered by family and the public sphere, unlike Rahel and Estha’s incestuous night, which remains invisible to both the private and public sphere. Yet both actions are transgressive, and both actions are initiated by the female characters, giving them certain agency.

Abjection, Transgression and Trauma

Rahel and Estha's relationship as twins can be read literally or metonymically. It is yet another dichotomy of myself/the other, male/female, that is blurred and unclear. Estha is only "older by eighteen minutes" (4). Roy's choice of creating characters who are twins, a boy and a girl, is not capricious. They are clearly a boy and a girl, not to be confused with each other physically, yet they are one and the same: "The confusion lay in a deeper, more secret place...Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We or Us...physically separate, but with joint identities" (4). This twin identity then, being both male and female, both subjective experiences combined to form one identity, necessarily constitutes a double trauma. Estha's traumatic experience of molestation affects Rahel too: "She remembers, for instance (though she hadn't been there) what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha" (5). Reading them as one character, and particularly reading Estha as Rahel's double, further stresses the theme of madness in Roy's text. Estha and Rahel are both traumatized by the events of their childhood, Velutha's death, their cousin Sophie Mol's death, and their eventual separation from each other and Ammu. Both twins grow up severely scarred and traumatized, each considered 'mad' in their own way. However it is Estha who is physically molested and grows up to be obsessively clean, and walks around silently, never speaking to anyone. Reading Estha as Rahel's double is illuminating for understanding the madness that touches Ammu and her offspring. Estha's gender identity is blurred at various instances in the text. As a young boy, he joins his sister in dressing up in "saris (old ones, torn in half)...Estha was the draping expert" (180). It is Estha who is molested by the man at the cinema, it is Estha's body which becomes objectified, even feminized, and yet it is Rahel who recalls memories of what had happened to her brother. This specific sharing of a "single Siamese soul" presents itself

throughout the text, particularly as the manifestation of trauma. Estha retreats into silence and madness, and Rahel shares his traumas, but is not labelled as ‘mad’ as her brother. Estha’s silence places him on the margins, constantly ostracized and excluded from public society. He retreats into a more feminine space; we are informed by the narrator that Estha chose to do the housework at home, rather than go to college, “much to the initial embarrassment of his father and stepmother...he did the sweeping, swabbing, and all the laundry. He learned to cook and shop for vegetables...Slowly, Estha withdrew from the world” (12-13). Estha occupies “very little space in the world” and retreats into the private domain, a more feminine space, almost a retreat into the semiotic “*chora*.” Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic *chora* is useful for considering Estha's withdrawal from the world. Noelle McAfee’s book on *Julia Kristeva* highlights this separation from the symbolic realm and delving into the semiotic *chora*:

Lacking an interest in any objects, the melancholic lacks motivation to engage in the symbolic realm – that is, to speak or write. Words seem pointless, for they are not connected to the subject's affects, desires – in short, to the semiotic *chora*. The depressed person is like an orphan in the symbolic realm (63).

The usage of the word “orphan” is very apt in considering Estha’s alienated state, for he is literally an orphan (after Ammu’s death) and also separated from the mother at the age of seven, a trauma that leaves him incomplete, not whole, and alienated from himself/Rahel. The loss of his sister and mother violently pushes him outside the private female and maternal space, sending him into the public space, a space which had transgressed against his body (the molestation takes place at the cinema; i.e. a public space) and his emotional and mental state (the police station, where he witnesses Velutha’s death). As Estha descends into silence and ‘madness’ Rahel also crosses boundaries and transgresses in her own way. Rahel rebels against

authority in school and is considered to be corrupt, although it “appeared to be a civil, solitary form of corruption...It was, they [her teachers] whispered to each other, *as though she didn't know how to be a girl*” (18). Like Estha, Rahel transgresses gender boundaries, upsets authority figures, and struggles to make sense of the chaos within her, yet her anger is louder than his and fiercer. Like her mother, she opts for an interracial marriage, and later a divorce. Rahel and Estha only find consolation in each other after they meet 23 years later, when their shared trauma heals by sharing their bodies and mental/emotional states.

The multiple traumas in Roy's *The God of Small Things* affect the twins on a personal level, on a psychic level, and leave them dealing with the repercussions of everything abjected from society, until they become abjected subjects themselves, and until they become transgressors too. Julia Kristeva insists that “Abjection persists as *exclusion* or taboo (dietary or other)...but drifts over to more ‘secondary’ forms such as *transgression* (of the Law) within the same monotheistic economy” (17 *Powers of Horror*). Roy's characters are excluded from society, from both the private and public sphere, and they are constantly taking part in, or dealing with, transgressions. The abject and the abjected become intertwined with multiple transgressions and transgressive behaviour and subjects; transgressive subjects become the abject, the abjected.

Rahel and Estha, particularly, are caught between the past and the present, between memory and re-memory, trauma and healing. In “Trauma and Temporal Hybridity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*,” Elizabeth Outka relates personal trauma to collective trauma, and memory to time. She argues that there is a certain paradox in the experience of trauma in relation to memory and the freezing of time:

First, traumatic events may, strangely, be both erased from memory and yet return repeatedly as flashback....A second and related paradox involves the freezing of time at one instant, locking the subject in the past moment of trauma, yet alongside the freezing there is a false sense of movement or unfreezing, as the memory returns again and again to haunt the present (26).

As Outka convincingly argues, flashback and repressed memories unfold as the narrative progresses, and it is both Rahel and Estha who symbolize memory and repressed memories which continue to linger and haunt their psyches. As Outka eloquently puts it: “Not only is time scrambled for single characters, but memories have also split and are shared among multiple minds” (27). Rahel and Estha share the trauma; Rahel remembers, while Estha drowns in silence and repressed memories. His survival tactic is silence, repression of trauma, hiding away from the present. Time is static for Estha, while for Rahel, the past and present have become one, joined together to create a ‘temporal’ hybrid state of time: “Roy suggests that the traumatic production of temporal hybridity extends to collective memory...and hinting what little possibility there is that recovering a memory could ever morph to a more therapeutic sense of recovery” (30). Yet the twins are able to recover their traumatic memories and recover *from* their painfully linked traumas through their physical joining of traumatized bodies and minds. It is through their “transgressive sexual encounter” that they are able to reach a “twisted, traumatic recover, recovery in the sense of return” (46). However Outka insists that the narrative does not offer the twins any true sense of recovery, that the trauma re-enacts itself and the sexual transgression “creates no radical change” (47). I would argue that the twins’, specifically Rahel’s, initiation of the sexual and emotional transgression is an attempt at healing and recovery, and although we are informed that “what they shared that night was not happiness, but

hideous grief” there is still agency and healing in their very transgressive act, further reclaiming their past, their memories, and their traumas (Roy 311). Because what they have witnessed is trauma and abjection, then the only conclusion is yet another trauma which further alienates them from society and the borders and boundaries that culture upholds and maintains; they become the abjected themselves.

The God of Small Things links trauma to the abject, traumatized identities to abjected subjects; trauma and the abject are inextricably linked, both for the personal and the collective. The colonial trauma leaves identities abjected and rejected by themselves, alienated and annihilated, both internally and externally, both in the private sphere and the public sphere. Velutha and Ammu are always on the margins, always abjected, as are the twins for their hybridized identities and their transgressive mother, as well as their own transgressions. Estha and Rahel come face to face with the abject at multiple occasions in the text. From the very beginning, we witness Sophie Mol’s funeral through the eyes of Rahel. The scent of death permeates the scene, “a bee died in a coffin flower” (7). As Rahel watches the coffin being lowered into the ground, Rahel believes that Sophie Mol is still alive, and that it was her funeral that “killed her” (8). Rahel “heard on Sophie Mol’s behalf” the sounds outside of the coffin, and only Rahel “noticed Sophie Mol’s secret cartwheel in her coffin...Inside the earth Sophie Mol screamed ...But you can’t hear screams through earth and stone” (8-9). Rahel’s mind is unable to decipher the situation of her dead cousin; in Rahel’s mind, she is still alive, and it is the funeral that kills Sophie Mol. Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* considers the corpse as “the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life...It is something rejected from which one does not part” (4). The corpse itself, the dead body, exists on the margins. Kristeva asserts that the corpse, “a decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the

inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming...the corpse represents fundamental pollution. A body without soul, a non-body” (109). This blurring of borders and boundaries is apparent in the way Rahel is unable to separate Sophie Mol’s dead body from Sophie Mol the alive-and-well cousin. The confusion arises repeatedly, as this dead body is the abject, and a representation of the breakdown of borders and boundaries, social norms, and what is deemed proper. The funeral setting also exemplifies Ammu’s and the children’s abjection from the borders and boundaries of society. They are left alone, “made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them” (7). Ammu and her children, being the transgressors, are rejected and expelled from the private space (family) and the public domain, and this becomes apparent in the church’s refusal to bury Ammu when she dies. The twins also witness Velutha’s corpse-like state, before his impending death. It is Estha who is haunted by the memory of Velutha’s “swollen face and smashed, upside-down smile. Of a spreading pool of clear liquid...Of a bloodshot eye” (32). Estha is called in to identify Velutha as the kidnapper/rapist (after Baby Kochamma tricks him into doing so) and he is taken into a room where it is dark, “the smell of shit made him retch...Blood spilled from his [Velutha’s] skull like a secret...Police boots stepped back from the rim of a pool of urine spreading from him” (303). It is this very scene that marks the end of Estha’s childhood: “childhood tiptoed out. Silence slid in like a bolt” (303). Velutha’s death is the site of abjection, he is the abject, and the setting is one of defilement and disgust. As Kristeva explains: “Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death” (71, *Powers of Horror*). For instance, after Baby Kochamma frames Velutha and convinces the twins that in order to save their mother, they would have to merely say ‘yes’ when the Inspector asks them a

question about Velutha, she immediately “needed to go to the bathroom” (302). After manipulating the twins and framing an innocent man, Baby Kochamma needs to abject the impurity of what had happened, of what she had done, separate herself from the abject itself (Velutha). Kristeva maintains that the body, the subject, constantly wants to be and/or “become *clean and proper*” (108). It is worth mentioning that Baby Kochamma and Mammachi are both repulsed by the “particular Paravan smell” (Roy 244). There is, as mentioned earlier, a specific quality attached to the Untouchable, the Untouchable is the abject, from which one insists on separating; the caste system is always there, maintaining the separation from the abject, the impure, the marginalized. Kristeva identifies the caste system as “the most complex and striking instance of a social, moral, and religious system based on pollution and purification, on the pure and the impure” (79). Colonialism produced the caste system in its modern form by intensifying and manipulation social divisions. Similarly, it is the separation and upholding of binaries and dichotomies that necessarily constitutes a sense of protection of the self, of the ego, protection from merging with the other and a breakdown of rules and boundaries, the law. Estha’s multiple traumas are dealt with by abjecting himself; after being forcefully separated from Ammu, he screams that he is “feeling vomity” and Rahel, “doubled over and screamed and screamed” (309). The separation from the mother expels Estha from the symbolic realm, and instead, he embraces the semiotic, separating himself from speaking, from language, as he falls into silence.

Language and the *chora*

Roy’s text employs madness as a textual strategy to reveal multiple tensions. By using a *different* English language Roy chooses to break the rules of the English language and proper grammar. The narrative, through its fragmentation, and refusal to follow the rules of the English language reveals the traumas that have afflicted the private spheres and the public spheres, the

personal and the political. It is a narrative that abjects the symbolic, the Law, and instead, embraces and calls for a revolution in language, an embracing of the Mother, of a state prior to the violence of colonialism and the caste system, of dichotomous thought and power relations. The children suffer from the imposing of the English language, Baby Kochamma constantly eavesdrops on “the twins’ private conversations...and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine...She made them write lines...*I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English*” (Roy 36). In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon claims that speaking means “assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization” (2). Language is culture, and for the colonised, attempting to maintain one own’s culture as well as adopt/assimilate a new culture is a recurring burden. Fanon asserts that: “All colonised people –in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave – position themselves in relation the civilizing language...the more he [the colonised] rejects his blackness...the whiter he will become” (2-3). As such, the inferiority complex Fanon diagnoses continually arises in Roy’s text, as the twins struggle to speak in English, and accept themselves and their culture. This struggle is part of the assimilation madness that I mentioned earlier.

Roy’s text rejects any canonization of the English language, grammar, spelling, and any rules, any form at all. Textually, semantically, stylistically, *The God of Small Things* breaks all rules. As such, it is a mad text, a text that robs its readers of narrative certainty. There is nothing about the text that falls into a clear path. Madness in this text, then, is a violent pedagogy that is meant to disturb and unsettle its readers. It does not use English the way the coloniser implemented it in the colonies, it refuses to adhere to any narrative form, and instead, begins to sound more like poetry than prose. The text blurs the boundaries of prose/poetry, west/east, and

dismantles conventional English usage. Cynthia Driesen's "When Language Dances: The Subversive Power of Roy's Text in *The God of Small Things*" argues that language in Roy's text is extremely powerful and subversive, not only because of Roy's dismantling of the English language, but also because the narrative relies heavily on a child's point of view, rather than an adult's:

The children enjoy a kind of power through their play with language. Their reading backwards is tantamount to a powerful subversion of the established order: they read the words as they read the world in oppositional mode to that ordained by the powers that be...they make the only gesture of revolt available to them through language (368).

Because the narrative also dismantles the dichotomy of adult/child, it subverts social and cultural hierarchies, norms and conventions. It plays with perception, revealing that the child's view is more perceptive and clearer than an adult's which society deems as socially and mentally superior. In postcolonial space, the English language is associated with the West and is considered superior to local languages. The east is synonymous to the child, while the west is parallel to the adult figure who must educate and enlighten the child. Roy's text depends on a blurring of boundaries, breaking of rules, and subversion of all power relations and dichotomies. Kristeva's "Revolution in Poetic Language" considers the function of language in literary texts and the power of language and creativity as being associated with the semiotic *chora*, and that there must be a constant interplay between the symbolic and semiotic. Art and literature call for a breakdown of the binary that separates the symbolic from the semiotic, the conscious from the unconscious, and genotext from phenotext. For Kristeva, there is a "semiotic rhythm within language" and this is precisely what Roy's text does, which is emphasizing the semiotic and poetic dimension within narrative fiction. Kristeva posits the genotext and the phenotext are

necessarily different, yet in constant interaction. Texts function as both genotexts and phenotexts:

The genotext is not linguistic...It is, rather, a process, which tends to articulate the structures that are ephemeral (unstable, threatened by drive charges)...The genotext can thus be seen as language's underlying foundation. We shall use the term phenotext to denote language that serves to communicate, which linguistics describes in terms of 'competence' and 'performance'...The phenotext is a structure...it obeys rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee. The genotext...is a process; it moves through zones that have relative and transitory borders and constitutes a *path* that is not restricted to the two poles of univocal information between two full-fledged subjects (2177).

If Kristeva manages to differentiate between the two functionalities and positions of texts, then Roy's text is capable of tapping into the semiotic *chora*, and becoming more of a genotext, rather than a phenotext, in its dismantling of rules and structure. The text unfolds as a constant processing of what seems to be the unconscious as a narrative, a narrative filled with abjection and trauma, a narrative that rejects rules and attempts to create a new narrative, a mad narrative.

Kristeva notes that only some literary texts are capable of doing this: "Among the capitalist mode of production's numerous signifying practices only certain literary texts of the avant-garde (Mallarmé, Joyce) manage to cover the infinity of the process, that is, reach the semiotic *chora*, which modifies linguistic structures" (2178). The rejection of linguistic structures is apparent throughout Roy's text, as words are jumbled, re-written, re-appropriated, and rendered meaningless at times, as they may take on different meanings as well as feelings. There is a connection the mother, to the maternal, to a pre-Oedipal stage, and this is best

conveyed through a child's perspective, and a more rebellious form of the English language, mixed with Indian words and local language to create a new language; a language which attempts to be decolonised, and returned, in the same way that Estha is "re-returned" to his home, to his twin, to the maternal (Roy 11).

Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a constant process of delving into the semiotic chora, and creates a new place between madness/sanity, genotext/phenotext, west/east, English/local language, subject/other, adult/child. Roy's characters are 'mad', in the same way that the text asserts itself as a mad text, a text that is always encroaching upon borders and boundaries, a text that attempts to revolutionize language and meaning. There is always madness hovering around, "there was madness there that morning...it was no performance. Esthappen and Rahel recognized it" (224). Madness in *The God of Small Things* becomes a site for textual revolution, for dismantling dichotomous Western modes of thought, and for change both on a personal and a political level, for the individual and the collective. Unlike the Victorian mad heroine, the Postcolonial mad heroine must necessarily revolt against both the personal and the political; she must re-assert not only her subjectivity, but also her "native" identity— there is a process of double decolonization. In *The God of Small Things*, individual stories, individual traumas affect the bigger public domain, and the very small god manages to subvert the power of the big God; big things are no longer superior to the small. Intricate histories and stories, pluralities and multiple sites of trauma and madness join together to form a revolution and a reclaiming of both the colonised's mind and body, on an individual and a collective level.

Chapter Three: Crossing Over to Jordanian Fiction: Bedouin Madwomen in Fadia Faqir's*Pillars of Salt*

This chapter aims to situate the character of the Bedouin, in this case the 'Jordanian Bedouin madwoman' in relation to the previously mentioned female heroines in Victorian and Postcolonial literature. Fadia Faqir's text should be classified as Postcolonial fiction, although it deals specifically with an Arab-Bedouin society. Like Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Faqir's text emphasizes how patriarchal relations and colonial ideologies maintained the subjugation of Eastern women. Madness in this narrative is significantly orchestrated to reveal the agency it lends the female protagonists. This chapter formulates the following idea: the Jordanian woman was colonised by both the European and the local man. The European man seemed to offer a certain illusionary pseudo-liberation for the Jordanian woman, while the local man strived to exert whatever was left of his authoritarian voice and power, by opting for an extremist pathway, holding on rigidly to the traditional values to reinforce the hierarchy that had been destabilized upon the coloniser's arrival. As my reading of *Pillars of Salt* will demonstrate, traditional values and beliefs were not only preserved, but taken to an extreme, fixated by patriarchy in an unyielding manner, upholding traditional values as truths and allowing no room for women to negotiate their existence and space. At the same time, traditional values were shunned and disavowed by modernity. Negotiating one's space between the two disparate spheres entailed a certain fragmentation of the self, a hybridized identity attempting to bridge together tradition and modernity. The collision of tradition and modernity affected both the individual's private and public space. This is strikingly similar to my reading of assimilation madness in Roy's narrative.

The desire to assimilate and to adapt to multiple contradictory states of being fostered volatile environments for the protagonists. Madness for the colonised woman becomes an attempt at rebellion, a revolt against both patriarchal and Empire ideologies. One turns inwards to facilitate an altogether different form of agency and the madwoman voice is (paradoxically) the voice that is heard, as it threatens to disturb order that has been doubly imposed by patriarchy and Empire.

Fadia Faqir's work as an Arab writer writing about Arab or Jordanian culture in English has received critical attention. She is able to write as a Jordanian Bedouin woman, while using the language of the coloniser. Faqir's first novel *Nisanit* (1988) tells the story of a young girl and her father's involvement in Arab-Israeli conflicts. *My Name is Salma* (2007) tells the story of a Bedouin girl attempting to escape an honour killing and her subsequent migration to England. Salma's struggle is between two very different cultures and her quest to find her illegitimate daughter. Faqir's latest novel, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014) follows the journey of the protagonist, Najwa and her search for her father after her mother's death. Her father is mysteriously involved with Afghanistan and Najwa embarks on a journey from Jordan, to Afghanistan, and finally Britain. Faqir's novels have focused on themes of migration, displacement, and contact culture. In *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*, Claire Chambers interviews Faqir and asks her about her interest in disciplinary spaces such as prison and mental institutions. Faqir responds:

The fact is that my father was arrested, thrown in an army camp somewhere, and tortured... That's why I feel paranoid some of the time, because I think there will be a knock on the door and I will be taken away... Institutions become a part of my mental landscape: prisons, mental hospitals, asylums... Loss of control and sanity are themes that run throughout my work (61-62).

In *Pillars of Salt* the female protagonists are considered mad and are institutionalised in a mental asylum run by British male colonisers. This is by no means arbitrary, and as my reading will demonstrate, the themes of patriarchy and Empire, madness and protest, are very evident in Faqir's text.

To consider 'Jordanian women' we must take into account social, cultural, geographical, and historical aspects that formulate different socio-political identities. To explain Jordan's society and culture, a cultural anthropologist's view is perhaps most apt for this chapter. John A. Shoup's *Culture and Customs of Jordan* explains that Jordanians fall into separate, distinct categories of either Bedouins or *Hadar* (city-dwellers). The first category deals with the Bedouin population. Bedouins, or *nomads*, which seems to be the term more widely used in Western scholarship, have always been dispersed geographically, seldom contained within borders, unlike their counterparts, the *Hadar* (Shoup 7). For the sake of this project's goal of resisting notions of hierarchization and consequent subordination between Western women/Eastern women, and in this case Bedouins and *Hadar*, I shall use the term Bedouin, rather than nomad, to refer to tribal peoples and desert inhabitants. This semantic and/or linguistic awareness must be employed so as not to fall into any reductionism that overlooks the specificity of the Bedouins of Jordan, and their distinct culture, which ultimately differs from that of the city-dwellers. In the interest of specificity, I present the following excerpt from "The Modern Sociocultural Significance of the Jordanian Bedouin Tent" by Mahmoud Na'amneh, Mohammed Shunnaq and Aysegul Tasbasi:

Layne (1994) points out that several terms such as 'tribe', 'Bedouin', 'nomad', 'pastoralist' and 'desert Arab' are often used interchangeably. She adds that in Jordanian nationalist discourse and tourist-directed rhetoric, the 'Bedouin'

represent the archetypical Arab ‘tribe’ and frequently stand for Arab or Jordanian tribes in general...in Jordan in particular, once a synonym for pastoral nomad, now indicates a political identity of a tribal nature (Na’amneh, Shunnaq and Tasbasi 149).

As such, the Middle Eastern Bedouin, and even more exclusively the Jordanian Bedouin, represents an Arab tribal identity, an identity which includes personal, social, cultural and political dimensions. By placing emphasis on the Bedouin’s subjectivity, rather than using “Bedouins” or “nomads” as objects of analysis, perhaps a newer understanding of the importance of representing and reading *different* and *differing* identities will be posed. Unlike the term “nomad”, its semi-synonym “Bedouin” grants an individualistic specificity, a sense of identity that distinguishes, yet still manages to assemble the collective (the tribal peoples) under its umbrella. The term Bedouin emerges as a type of political tribal identity, but this is not to deny other forms of identity which are infused within the Jordanian identity:

National identity in Jordan has always been intermingled with other forms of collective identity such as Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism and Tribalism. Thus, local patriotism has competed against other local, regional and transregional identities, whether national, religious or otherwise. The existence of such myriad forms of identification is not peculiar to Jordan; it is indeed common to many other countries in the Middle East. These constituent elements are not mutually exclusive, for they often overlap and complement one another (Na’amneh, Shunnaq and Tasbasi 157).

The Jordanian identity remains in flux, and can be complex. Jordanian city-dwellers identify themselves firstly and foremostly as Jordanians, whether they are Palestinian-Jordanian, or belong to other ethnic groups including “Armenians, Circassians, Shishans, and Turks” (Shoup

8). Shoup emphasizes the following formulation of Bedouin Jordanian identity and its role socio-politically:

While much of the population is of village or urban backgrounds, the Bedouin have set their seals firmly on Jordanian identity. The strong Bedouin character is evidenced in the spoken dialect of most Jordanians and sets them off from those of Palestinian origin... The result has been a 'Bedouinization' of the Jordanian population with many even taking on the speech, mannerisms, customs, and behaviour of the Bedouin (5-7).

Throughout my reading of Faqir's text, the distinction between Bedouin Jordanian women and Jordanian women city-dwellers will be present, so as to include both disparate identities and maintain their specificity.

Joseph A. Massad explains the root of the word Bedouin in *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* as follows:

The etymological root of Bedouin (or *Bedawiyy/a* in the singular or *Badu* in the plural) in Arabic derives from *bada* as in "to reside in the *badiya*" meaning the desert, hence a Bedouin is an inhabitant of the desert who leads a nomadic lifestyle (126).

Massad's definition is anthropological and historical, neglecting one important aspect of the multiple dimensions of the Bedouin's identity. Many Bedouins today do not lead "nomadic lifestyle[s]" and do not inhabit the desert. Bedouins have adapted to the modernization of the world, and they have been affected with globalization. However the tribal community itself remains intact and has not been completely demolished by British colonialism. Bedouin culture has managed to sustain itself in the face of the British Mandate in 1920 (Massad 11). Jordan underwent two colonial rules, the first being the Ottoman Empire's rule, and the second when British colonial forces overtook Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan. Transjordan was named by the

“British parliamentarians after World War One” and was only changed to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1946 (Massad 12).

In *The Making of Jordan*, Yoav Alon, a cultural anthropologist, identifies the continued existence of tribalism:

Tribalism has demonstrated impressive resilience. For decades tribalism was thought of a dying phenomenon retreating before the sweeping forces of modernity while trying to delay their positive progress. The post-colonial nation-state was expected to erode tribal forms of identity and social and political organization...In this way tribes play a crucial role in cushioning and smoothing out processes of rapid modernization. By doing so, they help to maintain a sense of close and intimate community...and prevent or at least postpone social unrest (7).

Alon’s vision is slightly unaware of the multifaceted aspects of the colonised peoples’ experience. First, to dismiss implicitly the Jordanian Bedouin identity and its strong cultural roots is to undermine the colonised’s methods of resistance to colonial and neo-colonial relations. Second, another inadequate observation is made conclusive, by implying that tribalism was maintained merely to avoid “social unrest” and it served as a cushion against “modernization” as though the colonised carried characteristics of backwardness and savagery. Because the Bedouin identity has not succumbed to utter assimilation and adoption of the coloniser’s ways and habits, this poses a perplexing problem for Alon, and by extension, his reader. Alon’s study falls into the dangerous shortcoming of orientalising the Bedouins, as he attempts to analyse the reasons of the continued existence of the Bedouin identity and tribalism’s dominance.

This is not to deny that the aftermath of colonialism remains difficult to overcome and that imperialist domination remains a challenge. Amilcar Cabral insists on the importance of cultural preservation in his *National Liberation and Culture*:

The value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated. Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history (54).

Cabral understands and emphasizes the indispensability of local culture as well as its fragility in the face of colonialism and imperialism. When the colonised's culture is entirely erased and replaced with the coloniser's own ideological systems of belief, then the struggle for national liberation ceases to exist. There has been a certain colonial legacy which seeks to explore the ways by which oriental women were suffering under their own cultures, the cultures that were untainted by the coloniser, and the Occident positioned itself as an emancipatory force, through colonialism's justification and imperialistic notions. Lila Abu-Lughod's *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* examines the condition of women before and after colonial contact in the Middle East and Egypt:

Low status [was] attributed by missionaries and colonial officials to colonised women – represented as the victims of tradition, whether Hindu, Muslim, or pagan – were used as a justification for rule (Abu-Lughod 14).

The coloniser masked himself as a supportive figure; however, in actuality, there are instances which reveal great contradictions. For example, Abu-Lughod draws upon Leila Ahmed's argument that colonialism aimed to liquidate culture as well as control economic and political spheres:

[Ahmed] argues that what the colonists sought was to undermine the local culture... Lord Cromer, the British governor of Egypt in the early years of the twentieth century, seemed to champion the emancipation of Egyptian women while condemning women suffragists back home” (Abu-Loghd 14).

Male colonisers were incapable of accepting the Victorian English woman’s emancipation, let alone Eastern women’s. As Ahmed mentions, the British governor of Egypt falsified a certain image that supported Egyptian women, whilst oppressing English women “back home.” This obvious contradiction between the two ideologies provides further insight into the shared experiences between the Eastern and Western madwoman. As such, my drawing from Bedouin as well as Indian and other postcolonial texts is crucial for understanding that British Empire perpetuated and profited from racial and gender oppression.

Colonial Contact, Remains of Culture, *Turath* and Modernity

Jordanian Bedouins have managed to preserve and maintain the remnants of their culture, but as my reading of Fadia Faqir’s *Pillars of Salt* will exemplify, their culture has been exposed to the horrific violence of colonialism, and was thereby infused with heightened patriarchal oppression. Women were made to suffer from both the colonial regimes as well as patriarchal oppression which prior to colonialism had not been so tyrannical. In order to clarify this double oppression, let us consider Amina Mama’s “Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa.” Mama deals with the effects of colonialism and the violence implemented against women. She situates patriarchal oppression and injustice as equivalent to colonialism and even more dangerously, imperialism. As my project aims to illuminate the overwhelming similarity between the Western “madwoman” and Eastern “madwoman”, Mama’s argument manages to outline the patriarchal and racist Europe as the root

of both Western and Eastern women's subjugation. She draws on the African woman's experience under colonialism specifically, but by theory of extension, it applies to the Bedouin women's condition:

In eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, class, race, and sexual inequalities acted in concert with one another, generating a repressive imperial ideology that was to be reflected in all aspects of colonial, legal, and administrative treatment of the subject peoples. This was to have particular implications of gender relations rendering African women more vulnerable to the violence emanating from both European and African sources (255).

Mama deals with African examples, yet it is not difficult to apply the very same line of thought to the Jordanian Bedouin woman's experience with colonialism.

The notion of upholding traditional values and positing them as indisputable truths is known as *turath*, as Massad carefully identifies it in *Desiring Arabs*. *Turath* in Arabic literally translates to heritage. When the postcolonial Arab self and sense of identity were faced with the many repercussions of colonialism, and with a tide of rising globalization, this idea of *turath* came into being. Massad clarifies the ideas attached to the term: "The term *turath* refers today to the civilizations' documents of knowledge, culture, and intellect that are said to have been passed down from the Arabs of the past to the Arabs of the present" (17). For Massad, *turath* was set up against modernity and, unsurprisingly, Western ideals and globalization. Because the East was, in a sense, Europe's childlike version of itself, its past, it was seen by the elitists and "civilized" as backward, unable to move along, unable to embrace civilization. The notion of civilization as employed by the West was a necessary constituent for colonialism. As such, this obsession with *turath* is highly problematic, as it places the Arab collective in a confining space and continues

to stereotype Arabs as lazy, backward, and regressive. Massad understands the complexity of this situation and draws upon the unavoidable fact that modernity is regarded as inextricably linked to Western ideologies: “For it was Europeans who ‘discovered’ the decadence of the Arabs” (3). Indeed, constructions of “culture” and “civilization” were imposed to further secure the political, economic, and social power relations between West/East. To abandon one’s *turath* and culture would be to assimilate (in the same way as ‘assimilation madness’), to adhere to a universal or global definition of modernity, but is this resistance to modernity simply yet another power struggle between the Occident and the Orient? Or is the preoccupation with cultural values and *turath* necessary to devise a national self, a self resistant to colonial and neocolonial relations and influences? How does the formation of a national self affect relations between Jordanian men and women? Masaad explains: “Since the onset of colonialism, the other for the ‘Arab’ collective psyche, as it has been for the rest of Asia and Africa, has been and continues to be the West” (17). This holds for all dichotomous modes of thinking and power relations. For instance, not only has the West been the ‘other’, but Eastern women have been the inferior other for Western women, an “other” that has fallen behind and occupies an arena which Western women falsely believe they have not experienced because they are sheltered by modernity and civilization.

Pillars of Salt poses numerous questions about the Jordanian self and implies that this obsession with *turath* and modernity remains problematic both for the individual and the collective. Faqir is faced with the burden of being an Anglophone writer; a fear of betraying the Arab culture continues to haunt her work. To write of the Jordanian man’s patriarchal attitude, is to risk stereotyping the Arab as backward and unable to embrace Western definitions of modernity, let alone women’s emancipation. However a crucial aspect of the preservation of

culture is the corresponding double standards employed by male characters. At times, they are able to embrace modernity (when it suits them) and borrow certain ideas from the coloniser to further position themselves as important subjects, rather than the objects which colonialism has made them into, and simultaneously disavow Jordanian women. Faqir manages to incorporate colonialism's effects on the Jordanian man, and of course, Jordanian woman, through exposing the tensions the culture faced, as it was stuck, made immobile, and was constantly looking backwards, for a sense of *turath*, at a time before colonialism.

The title itself exemplifies this dilemma, as it alludes to the Biblical story of Lot and his wife, as she was looking back; she was transformed or frozen into a stone pillar of salt. Of course this is only one interpretation that may prove useful in understanding the narrative's progression, the protagonists' inability to move towards a brighter future, and the general fixation on *turath* and the lingering past, causing a certain immobilization of the individual and the collective. Simultaneously, in the face of modernity, colonization, and globalization, *turath* emerged as the disavowed part of the individual's sense of self as well as the collective. To maintain a certain level of *turath* became increasingly difficult, as colonization, neocolonialism and modernity attempted to rid the individual and the collective of traditional values. To move forwards, one had to loosen his/her grip on *turath*, but the movement forwards also entailed a disruption and fragmentation of the self. A second interpretation of the title (albeit straightforward) would be a geographical one which places the narrative in Salt, a city in Jordan known for its artistic pillars, its historic sense which tends to attract many tourists. Finally, a third interpretation of the title is its allusion or reference to T.E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. This specific interpretation will later be explored within the context of the text's narrator. For this chapter, all of the above interpretations may be drawn upon to illustrate the

cohesiveness of time and space and the importance of situating the novel within its geographical, cultural, and national frontiers.

Anglophone Writing/Jordanian Fiction

To situate Jordanian fiction and Jordanian writers, Radwa Ashour explains that Jordanian fiction includes writers from Jordan or writers of Palestinian origin (*Arab Women Writers*.)

When Palestine was occupied by Israel in 1948, this caused a “geographic dispersion of Palestinians. This affected writers and was reflected in how they identified themselves. There were writers living in Jordan...who are usually referred to as Jordan writers, though sometimes described as Palestinian writers...the permutations are endless” (206). Ashour is also careful in distinguishing the rise of the Palestinian women writers from the Jordanian women writers:

“Women writers appeared in Palestine from the early part of the century, but in Jordan they did not emerge until some four decades later” (208). For Ashour, Jordanian fiction itself, regardless of the writers’ origins tends to include the following themes:

There are texts that focus on the interior experience of a particular character in a moment in which the feelings of a besieged, oppressed, person reach a crescendo in the midst of a terrifying Arab reality...There are stories concerned with portraying a slice of human experience and observing its details (222).

Ashour does not provide examples of this “terrifying Arab reality” but we may deduct the possibility of the existence of *turath* and modernity tensions, an even more terrifying female reality, and an ultimate descent into madness. As such, Faqir’s text will exemplify the recurrence of themes of self-annihilation, alienation, and marginalization within the fictional narratives of Jordanian writers.

Because Faqir writes in English, it is important to distinguish her positions and situate her as an Anglophone writer; although her fiction is still Jordanian-Bedouin, it occupies a hybridized space. *Arab Voices in Diaspora* aims to locate the hybrid identity of Anglophone writers as well as the fiction produced under the umbrella of Anglophone Arab fiction. Anglophone Arab writers, Layla AlMaleh tells us, emerged recently, and they did not gain “attention or attain recognition until the world woke up one day to the horror of the infamous 9/11 and asked itself who those ‘Arabs’ really were...Bookstores in Western cities and towns began to display on their shelves arrays of Anglophone Arab works placed next to Afghan, Pakistani, and Iranian ones” (1). Almaleh laments that the Anglophone Arab writer only attained visibility through “terror” and a Western desire to understand the Arab and Islamic psyche (2). Arab fiction written in English appealed to the Western audience and the “implausible subaltern crossing language borders seemed to add to the exotic sensation evoked by such works” (10). When Anglophone Arab writers’ works were highly esteemed and acclaimed, the reasons stemmed from “the ‘miracle’ of foreign-language acquisition...also the equally ‘impressive’ cultural crossing that came with it” (10). Because Arab-American or Arab-British writers were capable of adopting a space between East and West, they were able to write as both outsiders and insiders. The dichotomies of East/West, inside/outside were contested.

Almaleh examines the condition of the Anglophone Arab writer, especially the diasporic writer, residing in the West, and writing from “beyond Arab borders” (14). This diasporic space “grants the Arab intellectual, regardless of the linguistic tools at his disposal, an open form for raising his voice in protest or clarification...[writers] write from their diasporic locations –or rather, dislocations” (14). Diaspora allows Faqir to look back at *turath* and envisage a place for modernity. The position of Anglophone Arab writers allows them to offer “their own

reformulations of culture and subjectivity...they benefit from their positions as ‘outsiders’/ ‘insiders’ and enter into a dialogue with past and present, the distant and the near” (15). Also, Almaleh identifies the inextricable link between the personal and the political and specifically finds that “political and gender issues intertwine, the one leading to the other” (14). Gender issues, are of course, closely related to the ideas of culture, *turath*, and traditions. Through her fictional narratives, Faqir is able to present the personal and political dilemmas as interchangeable and dependent on the other’s effect. This is reminiscent of Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, in which the personal is the political, the small things are the “big” things, the individual’s struggle is the collective’s struggle. Faqir’s *Pillars of Salt*, like Roy’s text, is preoccupied not only with native culture and patriarchy at home, but also with colonial contact and the effects of colonialism on both the individual and the collective.

Narrative and Voice

To begin with, *Pillars of Salt* chronicles the life and ill-fate of the protagonist, Maha, who belongs to a Bedouin tribe called Al-Qasim. The plot begins with a Storyteller’s narrative, a man who is a foreigner, yet grants himself the authority to tell the story of the tribe. The narrative is arranged in such a delicate manner that there are three narratives, rather than one, as such three distinct voices that constitute the whole. The first narrative is the Storyteller’s, the second is Maha’s, and the third is Um Saad’s. There are many reasons for this strategic arrangement as my detailed textual analysis will reveal. The events of the novel take place during and after the British mandate in Jordan, 1921 (3). Set against the backdrop of colonialism, tribalism, and patriarchy, the text aims to expose the damage that was done to the nation and the self, the brutalities and inhumanness that were part of the public and private spheres, and most significantly, the position of women as doubly marginalized. Caught between a pre-colonial era

and colonialism, tradition and modernity, private and public, order and chaos, the female characters struggle to find a place amidst prevailing tensions. After years of struggling against patriarchy and colonialism, Maha is confined to a mental institution, where she meets a city-dweller, Um Saad, who shares a similar fate. Although both women belong to different sections of society, and come from different backgrounds, they eventually occupy the same space: Fuhais Mental Hospital (7). At the asylum, they are able to remember and recount their stories to each other as they voice their trauma. Throughout their articulation of their memories, they begin to develop a sense of sisterhood solidarity, forming an alliance against oppressive forces, namely, the English doctor who constantly subjugates them to electrotherapy. Maha and Um Saad are labelled as “mad” and they are confined to the asylum by the men in their lives, where they both struggle to realize the power of the oppressive forces which worked to outlaw them, alienate them, and condemn them to insanity.

The opening line attempts to establish the authenticity of the Storyteller’s narrative by stating: “In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful: Confound not truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth” (1). Faqir uses the common opening line of any Quranic verse, and a line Muslims use widely, “In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful.” This line attempts to establish the validity of the Storyteller’s narrative, linking him to an Islamic discourse, creating a non-negotiable space for him to speak his words, which the reader assumes would be truthful. Calling upon the name of Allah almost certainly lends a truthful aura to the Storyteller’s tale and persona. Not only does this specific line allude to religious piety, but also it is used even before eating a meal, as though we are about to devour the novel, and must be thankful for its existence. The novel appeals to all the senses, it is an enjoyable and rich meal, which leaves us with a mixture of fullness and a desire to abject its contents. Along with a rich

meal lurks the danger of abjection. Because Faqir's narrative is dense, filled with the dangers of coming face to face with the disavowed, the arena of insanity, the uncanny, then there always remains the danger of abjection.

Firstly, the Storyteller introduces himself by comparing his storytelling powers to those of Allah:

I will recount to you a horrific story. During the month of Ramadan, Allah the Mighty King revealed the Qur'an, mankind's guidebook through the forest of right and wrong. But I, Sami al-Adjnabi, the best storyteller in Arabia and the oldest traveller in the Levant, will reveal to you the tale of Maha, unfold the multi-layered secrets of both path and present (1).

Throughout the narrative, the Storyteller continues to draw upon Allah's words and places his narrative as equal to Quranic revelations, as precisely the "truth" rather than acknowledging multiple truths. His name, Sami al-Adjnabi reveals the following: first, the name Sami in Arabic differs from Sammy in English. Sami literally means "elevated one." Al-Adjnabi, his last name, translates into "the foreigner." As such, the Storyteller is a foreigner to the land, someone who believes himself to be the "best storyteller in Arabia" and consequentially speaks *for* Arabia. His voice is that of the Orientalist's and the patriarch's. The Storyteller occupies a place both inside and outside Arabia; he is, in a sense, the English of the Arabs, similarly to Lawrence of Arabia. His alliance with the English is expressed indifferently:

While trotting down to the village, I noticed that the plateaux were swarming with young English soldiers. They first arrived in the valley in the Year of the Lord 1921. My friend the English traveller, who turned over ever pebble on their plans and mountains, measured the land and then took notes, called it the 'Mandate.' Their cars and tanks

exhaled black smoke into the clear blue sky. I waved to the peeling red faces of the Mandate and continued walking. Mandate or no Mandate, I did not care (3).

The audience is made aware of the colonization of the land, the pollution that had tainted the otherwise “clear blue sky.” The description of the colonization process as a mechanical inspection of the land and subsequent naming of it as “Mandate” or later “Transjordan” is the first devastation of the land, the first transgression committed against nature and the natives’ land. However this action on the coloniser’s part does not faze the Storyteller; after all, he is able to refer to the English as “my friend [s].”

The Storyteller’s presence is a symbol of the Western, Orientalist, traveller’s narrative voice as it wrote and labelled the East, while Maha’s narrative, as well as Um Saad’s is an attempt at re-writing the East and Eastern women. Diya M. Abd o’s “How to be a Successful Double Agent: (Dis) Placement as Strategy in Fadia Faqir” analyses the usage of these three structured narratives and the strategic positioning of the Oriental Storyteller as the misogynistic voice that continually disfigures women’s experiences and erases their voices. Abdo understands Faqir’s characterization of the Storyteller as the Oriental Storyteller as essential to the text’s potential for subversion of previously established “androcentric narratives” (243). Storyteller represents various oppressive voices, all the while causing tensions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the narrative. The Storyteller is a foreign voice, not quite English, yet not quite Arab, and not Bedouin. Maha’s narrative is juxtaposed in relation to the Storyteller’s, speaking for herself, and, to borrow Gayatri CHAKRAVORTY Spivak’s term, the “subaltern.”

The subaltern’s voice is placed alongside the Orientalist’s authoritative narrative. Edward Said’s view on Orientalism is perhaps most apt in this discussion, specifically concerning the articulation of the Orientalist’s narrative:

Only an Occidental could speak for Orientals, for example, just as it was the White Man who could designate and name the coloured, or nonwhites. Every statement made by Orientalists...conveyed a sense of the irreducible distance separating white from coloured, or Occidental from Oriental; moreover, behind each statement there resonated the tradition of experience, learning, and education that kept the Oriental-coloured to his position of object studied by the Occidental-white, instead of vice versa (228).

As Said suggests, the Occidental, the Orientalist traveller, was able to speak for the Oriental and inscribe imagined identities and exaggerated flaws. Faqir's Storyteller speaks not only for the Oriental but also for the silenced, subaltern women. His version of events greatly contrasts with the realities of Maha and other women's lives. Because storytelling heavily depends on imagination, creativity, and fabrications, then it is safe to suggest that orientalist narratives were as equally unrealistic, at least for the purpose of Faqir's text. Said explains: "Passages of narrative description regularly alternate with passages of re-articulated definition and judgment that disrupt the narrative; this is a characteristic style of the writing produced by Oriental experts" (228). Said's commentary on narrative descriptions is vital to understanding the Storyteller's account of Maha and her tribe, as he continuously inserts his own judgment. Take for instance his first description of Maha: "Some say that Maha was as pious and pure as Rabia al-Adawiya, the mother of Sufis and Allah's chosen songstress...I say that Maha was a shrew who used to chew the shredded flesh of mortals from sun birth to sun death" (2). Rabia al-Adawiya, as the Storyteller correctly describes her, was an important Sufi figure, but more significantly, men "sought her advice on legal matters...[and] spiritual advice and supplications...[men] transmitted Rabia's words of wisdom" (*Early Sufi Women* 74). The Storyteller dismisses what members of the tribe say about Maha, her resemblance to Rabia, and

inserts his own judgment of her and poses it as the ultimate truth, since “the Arabs of Hamia, who had no dignity themselves, were born in that salty land...they lived there, counting winged cockroaches, then died there and were thus consigned to oblivion. And who am I? Sami al-Adjnabi. Who am I?” (Faqir 4). The Storyteller tries to maintain his authority as an objective outsider while positioning the Bedouins and Maha as objects. He must write them, speak for them, as they will always remain in “oblivion.” Said refers to this tendency to diminish the Arabs’ insightfulness or any depth that they might possess: “As a collective entity, then, the Arab accumulates no existential or even semantical thickness” (230). Said draws this conclusion from the works of many Orientalist travellers, including T.E. Lawrence’s travel diaries (228-32). The Storyteller repeatedly stresses his importance and his subjectivity, reminding us of his name, asking his audience and reminding them of his indispensable role as active agent, while all the “Arabs” are assigned to the collective, as mere objects. He seeks to be the authoritative voice of the Arabs, or specifically, the Jordanian Bedouins. Not only are they objects, but they threaten his very existence, his sense of self. At a certain point in his narrative, he ponders: “What was I doing in that mad valley? Allah might strike the land again and bury us all alive underneath the earth...I might turn into a pillar of salt” (88). The Storyteller’s question and fear of the “mad valley” is reminiscent of the British Empire’s preoccupation with illness and madness as I have mentioned in Chapter One. The Storyteller is afraid of his association with the “mad valley” and more significantly, afraid of turning into “a pillar of salt.” The land is associated with the biblical story of Lot’s people, as he continuously reminds us, but even more persistently is the idea of regression, constantly looking back, and immobilization. This takes us back to Masaad’s notion of *turath* and modernity. If the coloniser, or the foreigner, or the Storyteller, or the Orientalist, falls behind, regresses to *turath* and primitivism and abandons modernity, then he is condemned

to being “a pillar of salt.” Faqir exposes the Storyteller’s fears, racist ideologies, patriarchal and misogynistic approaches through his commentaries. The Storyteller is only concerned with Maha’s story, her experiences, as is typical of Orientalists, for whom women become figures for diagnosing the health and regression of the nation. Meyda Yeğenoğlu in *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* explores the correlation of the Orient with the female:

The Western subject’s desire for its Oriental other is always mediated by a desire to have access to the space of its women, to the body of its women and to the truth of its women. What explains such an obsession with the Oriental woman is the metonymic association established between the Orient and its women... The process of Orientalization of the Orient is one that intermingles with feminization... Thus one can easily see that within the symbolic economy of Orientalism, the typography of femininity as enigmatic, mysterious, concealing a secret behind its veil is projected onto the iconography of the Orient. The horror and threat of what is assumed to be hidden behind the Oriental/feminine veil is revealed in and by these representations (73).

Faqir’s Storyteller emerges as the self-orientalising Orientalist, who is both fascinated and repelled by the Orient and its women, one who needs access of this space which belongs strictly to women, but relies on his imagination when denied such access. Yeğenoğlu highlights the relationship between the Western subject’s desire to explore and penetrate the Orient and its women. The Storyteller is presented as a voyeur, objectifying the female body. It is with that same fervour that the Storyteller yearns to explore Maha’s life, as the narrative reveals throughout its progression.

Maha's Narrative

Throughout numerous instances in the text, Faqir undermines the Storyteller's narrative by setting up Maha and Um Saad's alternative narratives. Rather than positing the Storyteller's depiction of Arabia and Arabian women as the "truth," we are faced with multiple stories, multiple perspectives, and many truths. Like Roy, Faqir is aware of the multiplicity of voice and multiple narratives. As discussed in the previous chapter on *The God of Small Things*, Roy's epigraph is a quotation from John Berger: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one." In the same way, Faqir uses the same narrative strategy: the multiplicity of voice. Maha's narrative begins at the mental hospital, where Um Saad is brought in as her new roommate. As she journeys back to her memories, and what brought her here, Maha's story unravels. Maha is the "daughter of Maliha, daughter of Sabha" and Sheikh Nimer's daughter (5). Maha takes pride in her mother's name, as well as her grandmother's. The storyteller remarks that Maha's mother "had some gypsy blood in her veins...seduced Sheikh Nimer" (3). Throughout Maha's narrative, with her fondness for her mother, we are able to discern the wonderful power of the maternal and the significance of mother-daughter relationships in her struggle against patriarchy and colonialism. This relationship is similar to Rahel's relationship with her mother, Ammu, in Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The mother-figure symbolizes the mother country as I have discussed in the previous chapter. Maha's mother, we are informed, had died of illness, an unknown type of paralysis: "The people of Hamia didn't know the cause of her illness" (21). Unlike the Storyteller's fabricated version of Maha's mother's witch-like qualities, Maha recalls her mother as wholesome and life-giving, until her death she continued to urge her to "drink some milk please" (22). Milk symbolizes nourishment, but even more so, the maternal and the connection with the mother. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julie Kristeva

touches on the bond that milk forms: “[Milk] mingles two identities and connotes the bond between the one and the other...A medium that is common to mother and child, a food that does not separate but binds, milk” (105). As such, Maha is forever bound to her dead mother. Not only does the power of the maternal reside within her, as she continuously refers to herself as her mother’s and grandmother’s offspring, but also, she is caught between the past and the present, *turath* and modernity, individuality and the collective.

At the asylum, Maha is able to narrate her story and the reader is exposed to the tensions between *turath* and modernity, self and society, and her quest for identity. Her story is set up using flashbacks and memories of the past intertwined with her present. When Maha first meets the “twin of [her] soul, Harb” she is caught between her innermost desires and the pressures of conformity and *turath*. Harb’s name translates into war, which is very symbolic and foreshadows the upcoming war between the Bedouins and the English. Faqir contrasts Harb’s masculinity with that of the foreign Storyteller; Harb is gentle, kind, and respectful. Upon first meeting Maha, Harb wants to meet with her at night, and promises that he will marry her. Her first reaction is to ask him if he is mad, and afterwards begins to question her position as a woman in relation to other women of tribe: “The women who loved my brother Daffash, who sneaked out stealthily in the middle of the night to meet him, were fools. Stupid idiots who risked honour for love. Did Harb think that Maha, too, the daughter of Maliha, was a fool?” (10). Again, Maha takes pride in being her mother’s daughter, rather than her father’s, but this is not to deny her loving relationship with her father. She decides not to see Harb, but at the same time regrets it: “I was a Bedouin woman, free like a swallow and as courageous as my grandmother Sabha. I should have listened to the call of my heart” (14). This first internal conflict is soon resolved when Harb in fact proposes, and Maha agrees to his proposal, thinking once again, that her

mother “was right...He proposed to me because I said no” (16). In this particular situation, Maha’s holding on to tradition and *turath* proves successful, yet Faqir still manages to question the irrationality of the situation through Maha’s commentary. Courting and relationships were equivalent to hunting: “My mother...told me that men were birds of prey, they chased the quarry as long as it was alive and struggling” (16). Maha faces many internal conflicts as she tries to find a place for herself, for her sense of subjectivity without undermining either tradition or modernity. Maha is not a passive, meek woman; she is able to question tradition and find various flaws with the tribe’s understanding of relationships between men and women, the coloniser and the colonised, and resists notions of subordination to local men and the coloniser. An example of her confrontation with *turath* and modernity arises when she is suddenly not allowed to spin on her engagement night, as she had been used to working on her grandmother’s and her mother’s unfinished carpet. The women of the tribe restrain her from working on the carpet: “My palms started itching for the spinning-wheel...I was not allowed to spin one thread that night...[They] insisted that spinning on the night of your engagement was a bad omen. I was not allowed to spin one thread that night” (24). There is nothing that she can do in the face of such a tradition and her frustration is expressed through the repetition of the words “I was not allowed.” On her wedding night, the women sing the traditional wedding song, a cherished part of their *turath*:

Our bride is green, green.

Her cheeks like apples.

Sprinkle jasmine flowers.

Light candles, burn incense (42).

There are many connotations for the bride’s “greenery”; one of them is the certain fertility she possesses; she will be a land that proves fruitful and fertile. Maha’s sardonic commentary is: “I

was neither green nor apple-like...My back muscles ached with exhaustion. I entered the tent, sat on the thick carpet, and stretched my stiff legs” (42). Maha is able to ridicule the traditional song and refute its validity, and by theory of extension, refute many traditional values that contradict her reality. Once she is inside the tent with her husband, Harb, there is yet another tradition to overcome, another obstacle she must face and negotiate. This obstacle, unfamiliar to the Western reader is referred to as *leilat-al-dukhla*, which roughly translates into the night of penetration, or the wedding night. The preoccupation with the bride’s virginity, chastity, and honour is part of the wider tradition and *turath* of gender roles. Lila Abu-Lughod explains in *Veiled Sentiments* how women are expected to behave:

The good bride screams when the groom comes near her and tries to fight him off. She is admired for her unwillingness to talk to the groom or answer any of his questions, as reported by the young men who listen outside the window on the wedding night. Even married women must deny any interest in their husband...Modest women mask sexual or romantic attachments... Men’s honour also rests on their mastery of ‘natural’ passions and functions, including sexuality (154-55).

Abu-Lughod’s study is insightful and helpful for situating Maha’s narrative; albeit an anthropological study, it helps explain the burden of honour, the production and maintenance of sexuality and behaviour in Bedouin society. Women carry the burden within their bodies, the burden of being virginal, pure, innocent, yet at the same time strong enough to fight the groom off. The idea of “the good bride” is engraved within society, and Maha fears not living up to the expectations and definitions of womanhood:

All the members of the tribe would wait outside the door for proof of my virginity.

Young girls, young boys, half-naked children, toothless old men, and horsemen were all thirsty for my blood. My heart started beating fiercely. What would he do to me? (44)

Although Maha fears what Harb might do to her, whilst simultaneously recognizing the significance of the night, Faqir manages to create a twist of events, rendering Harb unable to perform because of his mother's nagging and knocking on the door: "Come on son...the whole tribe is waiting. Shame in my old age is also waiting" (45). Harb's mother, Tamam, embodies tradition and *turath*, constantly pestering and invading one's private space. The private and the public are intertwined, and there is very little room for any "natural" sexual freedom, as everything is tied down to meanings of honour and shame. Maha becomes a political and social agent at that very moment of immobilization that Harb faces:

I was thinking of my honour. I was a virgin: I had the blood in me, but Harb was the one to spill it. Harb was the one who was supposed to prove that I was a virgin. What if they were never given the sheet with blood on it? They will think I had no honour. The shame of it will kill my father... I suddenly smiled and said, 'We can fool them...Prick my little finger with the end of your dagger'...I snatched the dagger and nicked the tip of my finger (45).

Faqir adds depth to Maha's character during this carefully woven scene. Although it is a traditional and straight-forward scene relating the events of the wedding night, and it is quite familiar to Eastern readers, it becomes defamiliarized and placed in a different context: in the hands of a Bedouin woman who must subvert traditional notions of gender performance. Maha hands Harb the dagger but he is unable to harm the woman he loves, and she ends up pricking her own finger and handing him the sheet of blood to show to the crowd lingering outside. Harb

is presented as a nurturing, emotional partner, contrary to popular belief regarding the Arab or Bedouin man as oppressive. He turns to Maha for help, letting go of his pride as a man and reaches out to her, proclaiming “I just cannot hurt you on our wedding night” (45). Maha and Harb manage to satisfy the crowd, as Maha is able to overcome the restrictions of tradition by resisting them silently, through manipulation and wit.

Abu-Lughod explains that a good bride must resist her husband’s advances and continue to behave modestly, for this is the concept of *hasham* which is central to Bedouin ideology. As an Arabic speaker, and also quite familiar with Bedouin dialect, I am able to understand Abu-Lughod’s hesitancy when she attempts to translate the word:

In the leading dictionary of modern standard Arabic, various words formed from the trilateral root hashama are translated by a cluster of words including modesty, shame, and shyness. In its broadest sense, it means propriety. It is dangerous to accept any one of these terms, however, lest we prematurely assume that we understand what the Awlad ‘Ali mean (106).

As a cultural and ideological term which cannot simply be translated with attention to philology, *hasham* needs to be contextualized. *Hasham* is inextricably linked to the dominant concept of honour. To lack *hasham*, one enters the realm of shame or at the very least, crosses over from the privileged sphere of honour in the honour/shame dichotomy. As such, *hasham* is a concept which stems from *turath* and is deeply embedded in Bedouin ideology and culture. Even with modernization, *hasham* remains an integral part of a “good woman’s” identity and self-worth. The distinction between good woman/bad woman is apparent and endorsed through this concept of regulating sexualities, desires, and performances. Maha struggles to negotiate her place and identity within the above mentioned dichotomies. There is very little room between good

woman/bad woman, and she finds it very difficult to expel internalized patriarchal ideologies of *hasham* and proper femininity. Faqir allows the reader to witness Maha's internal conflict: "I was a virgin and virgins must not respond to their men. He might think I was a loose woman. He kissed the left side of my mouth...Nothing like it...Allah damn old hags and old rules. I moved closer and put my arms around him" (51). Maha's thoughts echo Abu-Lughod's detailed description. Once Maha realizes that her inner self is struggling with "old hags and old rules" she decides to break with those patriarchal notions, although she refers to "old hags" and not old men. The voice of the maternal and the existence of the maternal, her mother, and other motherly figures are always central to Maha's progress or static stillness as a character. Maha asks Harb for one request, to go swim in the Dead Sea, and he happily consents (52). At the Dead Sea, they have sexual intercourse, and Maha states: "My body burst with heat and life. No, I would not follow my mother's advice. Forgive me, mother. The look in his eyes was one of respect and delight...Women of Hamia, you were living in a heap of dung" (54). Maha is able to surpass traditional values imposed on women and begins to take an active role as a socio-political agent. She begins to place emphasis on her body, allowing it room to exist and be listened to, without the burden of shame and *hasham*. Maha is able to experience the erotic and embrace it. In "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" Audre Lorde examines the way the erotic has been repressed and suppressed, especially for women. She explains: "For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within Western society" (277). Lorde deals specifically with Western society, but her analysis is easily applied to Eastern society, and even more specifically to this certain instance of the erotic as experienced by Maha. Lorde explains further:

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world...But the erotic offers a well replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation (277-78).

As Lorde suggests, the erotic is capable of opening a world of possibilities, a sort of self-discovery takes place and revelations are presented. The erotic is also part of Catherine and Heathcliff's passionate bond, as well as Ammu's and Velutha's. This merging, becoming one, and embracing the other is another form of agency. For Maha, this is clearly the case: "My inner soul reached out to touch the sky and bowed down to kiss the sea. I felt content with the gift of life and forgave time for all the miseries it had inflicted upon me...the river of Jordan which poured its sweet waters into the Dead Sea sang to the tunes of my love" (53-4). Lorde points out that when the erotic is recognized, if "recognized at all" then it is "relegated to the bedroom" (280). Again, her analysis applies to Western society and culture. However, in Bedouin culture, the erotic is hardly ever recognized even in the bedroom, and therefore Maha's experience of the erotic is a social and political act of agency and endows her with power. It undermines and threatens *turath*, *hasham*, and social restraints.

The Storyteller's version of Maha's experience of the erotic differs entirely. As an Orientalist and patriarchal voice, he disdainfully severs the beauty of the erotic and the love between Maha and Harb. He watches them as mere objects, rather than subjects, there for his own entertainment: "Prepare yourself for some fun. Harb kissed her and pulled her closer to him...If they had seen me, Harb would have shot me. Ha Ha Ha" (61). Faqir presents the Storyteller in an indecent and inappropriate light, exposing the Orientalist as a voyeur; a transgressor into the colonised's private lives. He adds in a typical Orientalizing and exoticizing

tone, “When naked, she had nothing Bedouin about her. White and glossy like porcelain, like candles, like Rose” (61). Rose is the Englishwoman who is only mentioned once, in relation to Maha’s brother Daffash’s infatuation with her as an Englishwoman. The Storyteller positions Maha, the Arab, the Bedouin woman in opposition to the Englishwoman, for she is the standard of beauty and femininity. Not only does she become an object, but when he does attempt to give her a voice, or make a subject out of her, he deforms her entire humanity, making her into a monstrous figure:

Hand in hand they immersed their bodies into the water. All the jinn and demons were flying freely in that devil-accursed land. She started pushing him down as if trying to drown him...A fierce struggle took place between them...He was resisting her spell by pushing his head out of the water. She trying to capture his soul by immersing him in that sea of demons (61).

The Storyteller labels the land as a “devil-accursed land” and Maha is labelled as a monstrous witch who is capable of possessing men. The power of the erotic is stolen from Maha in his version and it becomes disfigured. The Storyteller’s distorted version reduces Maha’s experience and he projects his misogynistic beliefs onto her, labelling her a witch. As Jane Ussher explains in *Women’s Madness*, since the seventeenth century men have considered women to be virgins or whores, good women or witches, and grey areas did not exist. Western society labelled and marginalized women who were “outside of the controls of a relationship with a man” and saw them as “threats” to the social order (47). The Storyteller describes Maha as a “she-demon...taught witchcraft by Harut and Marut, the accursed angels and masters of black magic. She used to spin and recite spells all night long” (27). Ussher explains that women were condemned to witchcraft if they were seen as dangerous and powerful, an active agent and not

passive. Ussher's argument may be applied to Maha's situation. As for a woman's sexuality, Ussher explains further: "A woman who was openly or actively sexual was in danger of being considered a witch. Sexuality, womanhood and witchcraft became synonymous. The combined fear, disgust, and suppressed sexual attraction felt for all women is clearly reflected in the fantasies and accusations surrounding the witches" (49). Ussher is aware of the discrepancies between men's fantasies and women's realities, and concludes "all women could be witches – their sexuality and fecundity made this so" (49). Also, similarly to Ussher's argument, this scene dramatizes the disfigurement of the subaltern's tale or voice, as the Orientalist speaks and rearranges the events in a way that oppresses, exoticizes, and degrades the colonised woman. The Storyteller's eroticizing of the Orient resonates with Said's description of Flaubert's infatuation with the Orient and the "almost uniform association between the Orient and sex. In making this association Flaubert was neither the first nor the most exaggerated instance of a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient" (188). Faqir weaves this motif carefully into the text's juxtaposed presentations of the Storyteller's as well as Maha's narrative. Faqir has managed to make the audience realize the fallacies of the Storyteller's version which is built entirely on personal, projected fantasies onto the figure of an Eastern woman.

Although Maha is happily married to Harb, both her public and private life provides no stability. War and British imperialism remain factors that threaten her sense of self, while the private sphere, domesticity and society's expectations of her, start driving her into depression and self-annihilation. She feels confined to the house she is living in with Harb and her mother-in-law, Tamam: "I looked at Harb's house and its small windows. It was full of corners and ours had none. My mother did not like triangular shapes...I must get used to sharp angles for the sake of my newly born love" (63). The triangular-shaped house is compartmentalized and is symbolic

of the oppression she goes through: patriarchy, religion, and colonialism. Initially, Maha had passed the virginity test, but then the village expects her to fulfil her role as a woman by proving her fertility. Since she fails to do so immediately, she is scrutinized and is labelled less of a woman. Her self-image begins to deteriorate and she begins to despise her body for failing her:

Oh how I hated the sight of my menstrual blood sticking out its tongue to me every twenty-eight days... Yes, Maha's body was as small as ever, her breasts were as limp as ever... I spent my days eating, drinking, and sleeping. My body preferred to have its own way and give me a sign of my bareness every month, letting loose the merciless tongues... I was besieged by fertility, ripe fruit and children playing in the yard all day long. Aunt Tamam saw them as a reminder (67-8).

As Maha's body begins to fail her, she is besieged not only by expectations of "fertility" but also by self-hatred and self-consciousness. Her entire identity as a woman is called into question. She screams at her husband "I am not barren. Do you hear me?" (69). She begins to spiral downwards because of patriarchy and society's defining of her as either a good woman or a bad woman in relation to fertility/barrenness. Her thoughts are occupied with worry and she is panic-stricken: "Harb would not leave me if I fed him properly and took good care of him. I was childless and must be a perfect housewife and mistress" (69). Her self-esteem is reduced and she feels not only objectified but also greatly shamed. Even her husband's companions speak of her "barrenness" as they equate her with a "rifle" that does not shoot, and must be replaced with another (70). Abu-Lughod explains women's function in a Bedouin society as follows:

A more serious source of female moral inferiority is sexuality, with which women are intimately associated through their reproductive functions... fertility activated by

sexuality is what defines younger women as females...Through sexuality and pregnancy, women lose control over their own bodies (132-33).

Maha becomes increasingly tied down to domesticity and obsesses over her fertility because she needs a sort of self-affirmation, a place to belong, a home to belong to without being reduced to a mere body part, the womb. However, because of the great value placed on women's ability to reproduce, her use-value plummets and she is unable to negotiate for herself an identity that is separate from motherhood. In *The Hidden Face of Eve*, Nawal El Saadawi explains the lack of self-ownership for a woman; a woman does not own her body when she suffers from various methods of brutalization of her body. El Saadawi is concerned with female circumcision, but also considers the significance of fertility and the measures society takes to ensure and regulate reproduction: "The woman has lost real ownership of her own body, it having been taken over by the State, which, in modern society, has inherited much of the authority and functions which at one times were those of the father in the primitive patriarchal system" (95). El Saadawi focuses on the role of the State and modern society in opposition to the individual. Public transgressions of the State and society affect the individual's own private space and inner balance, as is apparent in Faqir's text. Maha is situated in the "primitive patriarchal system" but El Saadawi does not fail to remark that even that system is uncannily similar to "modern society." Maha finally takes initiative and decides to seek the help of Hajjeh Hulala, a woman who acts as a sort of healer who uses herbs, but is also the daughter of a sorcerer. Maha's mother-in-law supports her and is relieved when Maha finally decides to get help. Of course, Tamam does not doubt for one second that it is Maha who is "barren" and not her own son. This is yet another example of patriarchy and the toll it takes on women's self-image and their quest for self-affirmation and identity. Because Maha needs Harb's approval, and feels threatened that he may take a second

wife, she decides to let her body be at the mercy of herbal treatments which prove to be unceasingly painful. At first, she is extremely uncomfortable and embarrassed about having another woman touch her, but she is forced to overcome her uneasiness and allow Hajjeh Hulala to invade her body, her private space, in the name of ridding her of “evil spirits” (74). This invasion of Maha’s private space is yet another form of oppression she endures. The reader is informed that Maha resists this invasion but is unable to stand firm in the face of Hajjeh Hulala and Tamam. Hajjeh Hulala inserts a sack of herbs inside of Maha, which she is supposed to leave in for three days: “The juices ran up to my brain and scalded it. I had to keep that thing in for three days... The fire was too much to put up with, so I begged Tamam to cover the window with a sack” (75). The agony Maha endures is evident as her thoughts are filled with resentment and anger towards women, patriarchy, and even motherhood:

They must eat dung. All of them. They wanted children from the milking cow... They dragged me to the bed and tucked me under the blanket. I threw the blanket off with all the strength I had and spat on the floor. I must pull the sachet out... I stuck my fingers into the trousers but two thin hands stopped me from pulling the herbs out... I did not want children. I was barren (75).

The physical pain mirrors the emotional instability that she faces. Maha is robbed of her body, just as her ability to be an active political agent is constantly repressed.

Socio-political agency begins to preoccupy Maha’s thoughts and the way she defines herself, both privately and publicly. Maha needs to prove her fertility, to bear a son for Harb, not only because of patriarchal oppression and expectations, but more importantly, because of her need to be politically active. Maha’s gender stops her from taking part in the war against the English, yet she wishes she could join her husband and the men on the battlefield (83). Maha’s

identity is called into question, as it is not enough for her to be merely a womb; she feels she is capable of doing more for her tribe and for her husband: “The village wouldn’t allow me to join Harb on the battleground, Harb needed my support. How could I fight the English? I must do anything to get pregnant” (83). Maha’s relationship with her husband Harb is not one of sheer domination and he is not a domineering presence in her life. He provides her with love and security, and at the same time, a certain degree of independence which the village does not allow her. For instance, he gives her the right to see her father whenever she pleases, unlike his mother Tamam, and the rest of the village, who believe that a woman should stay at home (84). Harb is depicted as a good man, Maha’s love and as she believes, her equal, for it is she who tells him, “Harb, I am your supporter” (84). In her private sphere, Maha’s life is not tainted and oppressive, it is spiritual and liberating, however, it is the public sphere that continues to threaten her state of mind and her inner balance. The Storyteller’s imposition on her life through the eyes of a patriarch and Orientalist allows the reader to witness the discrepancies and inconsistencies between what Orientalists believed took place and what really happened. For example, he relays Maha’s painful experience with Hajjeh Hulala’s herbal potions as one filled with eroticism: “Hulala, the daughter of a well-known Moroccan sorcerer...stuck her head between the lean thighs of the barren bride. The sound the bride uttered was like the purrs of a cat lying in the warm sunshine being rubbed upon its belly...Defying and yielding sound” (88). Faqir tactfully employs the Storyteller’s fabrications and fantasies to shed light upon the untruths depicted as the Orient’s tales and realities, whilst simultaneously juxtaposing Maha’s version of events (the subaltern’s) with his narration of events. As Said tells us in *Orientalism*, the Orientalist occupied a certain space which allowed him to unravel the Orient and speak for Orientals:

What he says about the Orient is therefore to be understood as description obtained in a one-way exchange: as they spoke and behaved, he observed and wrote down...And what he wrote was intended as useful knowledge, not for them, but for Europe and its various disseminative institutions. (160)

Thus, the Storyteller, the self-orientalising Orientalist, is able to remould events and ideas, stories and realities, and present them to the world as the “truth.”

Maha’s private life is affected when Harb dies, but in Harb’s death, the public suffers too, and his death functions as an allegory for the death of the nation. Harb had always been a warrior, always at war, yet he had lost the war, just like the Bedouins had lost the war, and Maha had lost her war with both patriarchy and colonization. Faqir manages to present Harb’s death as both emotionally crippling to Maha and politically devastating, leaving her both distraught and vengeful towards the colonisers. The death of war itself, the death of anti-colonial resistance is symbolized through Harb’s death. The private politics intertwine with the public politics. The news of Harb’s death, along with all the other Bedouin men who have fought the English, is brought to Maha by her friend, Nasra. Nasra, whose name ironically means victory, is the bearer of bad news at various instances in the text. Nasra informs Maha that the men have been “slaughtered like sheep” and that the English have “raided them with metal eagles...Sparkling balls over their heads. Shreds of cloth and oozing flesh, our men” (111). Nasra’s vocabulary is limited and describes the weapons used to murder the tribesmen as “metal eagles.” Faqir uses the language of the desert, the language and imagery of the Bedouins, specifically the eagles, as a way to describe the unfamiliarity of colonization to the land and the difference in military machinery and weapons. The colonisers possessed stronger and more advanced weapons and tactics which aided their mission of demolishing an entire tribe, and as such, the power relations

are evident. Nasra's words invoke the brutalization of humanity and the attack on the colonised's public and private space. The public and the private, the political and the personal intertwine and are inseparable. Even the Storyteller is able to acknowledge this intersection, although he still manages to disfigure Maha's tale: "The earth shook as if struck with an earthquake when Maha heard that her husband, Harb of Qasim, was slaughtered like a sheep" (113). Although the Storyteller depicts her as a sorceress, a witch, and evil, Maha is always associated with the land, the earth, nature, and the colonisers are associated with modernization. Harb's death signifies the loss of security and the loss of a home for Maha and for the rest of the tribe.

Throughout the text, weaving is a central motif; weaving is a form of expression of individuality and a creation of a female space that is not inhabited by colonialism or patriarchy. Maha enters into her realm of obsessive weaving of her grandmother's and her mother's unfinished carpet. Whenever she is faced with conflict, she begins to weave, as this the only space reserved entirely for her, and it helps re-create a connection with the maternal. After Harb's death, she begins to weave and spin madly: "I could not bear departures. If only people could spin some harmony in the threads of their life. If only, I started slapping my face and yanking my hair" (117). Nasra informs her that the people of the village are referring to her as "mad" and Maha agrees, yelling that she is mad, wishing that Harb could hear her (117). Her episodes of frantic weaving also relates to a need to hold onto the past and *turath*, to the maternal, her grandmother and her mother. When Maha weaves, she finds comfort, solidarity, and her heritage. The unfinished carpet is the voice of her grandmother, her mother, and all women before them, a story she must complete, a voice that must be heard. Weaving is predominantly linked to a female space, a space reserved only for women and female expression of identity, pain, and creativity. Patriarchs and the Storyteller refer to her as a witch who is also a

“ghoul, a daughter of a ghou, exposing long, sharp teeth” (86). Maha only finds peace when she gives birth to Harb’s son, Mubarak. With the birth of Mubarak, she feels that she has finally accomplished something, that this is not only a personal, private act, but it also public and political: “He would grow up to be the best horseman in the tribe and protector of our dwelling” (143). Maha is able to express political resistance through the act of giving birth to a son. The Storyteller, of course, fears Maha as well as her son. He refers to Mubarak as the “son of the Black Widow” (142). The image of the Black Widow is not familiar to the Arabs or to the Bedouins. It is a western image that only Arabic speakers familiar with the West would be able to grasp. Faqir uses that phrase to draw attention to the Storyteller’s misogynistic and Orientalist voice. The Storyteller’s version of Maha’s pregnancy and delivery is filled with fantasies and fearful conclusions:

He is not the son of Allah who was not born and never gave birth...Mary was chaste and pure but Maha of Qasim was foul and evil. Her husband was dead and had not mounted her for months. How had she conceived and who was the unfortunate father...Her belly was getting bigger and bigger and the deformed creature inside her was growing (139) .

The Storyteller brands both Maha and Mubarak, whose name translates into blessed, as cursed and demonic creatures. His reference to the Virgin Mary possibly reflects on his own Christian background, and his lack of Islamic knowledge is evident. He uses the name of Allah, yet Muslims do not acknowledge Jesus as the “son of Allah.” Faqir’s usage of the Storyteller’s lack of knowledge illustrates his hybrid state, his pretences, and his inability to speak for the subaltern or the other.

Harb, the Bedouin and Daffash, the “Slave of the English”

Faqir's characterization of Harb as a gentle, nurturing Bedouin man is contrasted with Daffash, Maha's brother, who represents both patriarchal authority as well as imperialistic ideologies that work together to subjugate and oppress women. Daffash, whose name translates into "pusher", is a force that embodies patriarchal oppression, someone that pushes Maha around and eventually destroys her. Throughout the text, Faqir presents Daffash as a patriarch, a rapist, and a "middle man", to borrow from Aimé Césaire. Faqir characterizes Daffash carefully, presenting him as the coloniser's puppet, infatuated with anything English and pining for the coloniser's approval. Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* examines the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised as follows:

Between coloniser and colonised there is room only for forced labour, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses. No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production (178).

For Césaire, the relationship between coloniser/colonised is one of master/slave dichotomy, based on domination and submission. My concern is this concept of submission, which Faqir explores through Daffash's character. Frantz Fanon examines the process of internalizing colonial values in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "The inferiority complex can be ascribed to a double process: first, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority" (xiv-xv). As such, Daffash submits willingly to the rule of the English, making "friends" with them and constantly seeking their approval. Maha and Daffash's father diagnoses his son's condition as the following: "My son...navigates by false stars" (21). The "false stars" allude to the

colonisers, to modernization, and his desire to follow in the footsteps of the coloniser. Daffash's father does not possess the sufficient vocabulary to assess and describe his son's state, but is able to understand the severity of Daffash's desire for assimilation and his lost identity and national pride as a Bedouin.

The notion of *turath* and modernity creates a problematic condition, a search for an identity and a space that encompasses both discourses, as there are always internal and external conflicts pressuring the colonised self. Daffash suffers from 'assimilation madness' in the same way that Chacko does in Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Daffash's relationship with Samir Pasha and the English colonisers calls his own sense of self into question. Only by oppressing and abusing Maha does he validate his own sense of self and existence. The cycle of colonial oppression can be usefully explained with reference to Bessie Head's "The Collector of Treasures." Head's fictional narrative explores the dimensions of colonial contact and oppression, how colonialism affected the colonised men, and how men in return oppressed the colonised women. For Head, the colonised man faces a sense of castration, a lack of male supremacy that had been robbed from him by the coloniser. Head describes this situation in the South African context, but given the structural similarities of the colonial processes, this also applies to Daffash:

He [the colonised man] became 'the boy' of the white man...Men and women, in order to survive, had to turn inwards to their own resources. It was the man who arrived at this turning point, a broken wreck with no inner resources at all. It was as though he was hideous to himself and in an effort to flee his own inner emptiness, he spun away from himself in a dizzy kind of death dance of wild destruction and dissipation (Head 92).

Daffash is “the boy” of the English and Samir Pasha, and is “a broken wreck” that also causes destruction to those around him. Faqir first introduces Daffash through Nasra’s rape incident. The situating of the rape incident has multi-fold purposes. Faqir sets up three characters’ qualities and their belief systems as they intersect in reaction to Daffash’s rape of Nasra. Nasra reports the rape to her friend, Maha, who is angered and takes a stand against her brother’s dominance and violation of women, and Daffash, who acts nonchalantly regarding the entire event, blaming Nasra for seducing him (11). Maha narrates the state she found Nasra in: “Her body was shaking, tears were running down her face, her dress was ripped open as far as her navel. My hands started trembling...it was too late. All I could do was clench my fists and punch the air” (11). Maha’s reaction is initially passive; however, when Nasra informs her that it is Daffash who has raped her, Maha is unable to remain motionless. She shifts into an altogether different mode, taking on the role of an active socio-political agent:

“Daffash, son of Maliha, I will drink your blood.” I tucked the end of my dress into my trousers and marched to our house holding Nasra’s wrist firmly. The cool air captured between houses patent my face and begged me to slow down. No. Never. I would kill that mule and save the women of Hamia..I pulled the English rifle off the wall...and pointed it at my brother who pretended to be asleep (11).

Maha rejects both her feminine dress-code and the “cool air” which is associated with nature, and by extension, nature is associated with the feminine and with women. She adopts a more politically active position and vows to save “the women of Hamia” regardless of the fact that Daffash is her brother. Maha chooses to support her friend Nasra and all the women of Hamia, hence she establishes a sense of female solidarity and commits herself to a politicized identity in defiance of patriarchal oppression. For Maha, women come first, not men, and certainly not men

like Daffash who employ both sexist and classist oppression. Daffash stands in opposition to Harb, who is entirely different. Nadine Sinno explains in “From Confinement to Creativity: Women’s Reconfiguration of the Prison and Mental Asylum in Salwa Bakr’s *The Golden Chariot* and Fadia Faqir’s *Pillars of Salt*”:

While Maha’s beloved Harb...displays heroic resistance and suffers a tragic death at the hands of the British military, her brother, Daffash loses his soul as a result of his allegiance to the coloniser. Contrary to Harb, Daffash...internalizes the colonialists’ tastes, judgments, and values and becomes a puppet in the hands of the English authorities as well as the Turkish Pashas who facilitated the occupation and pillaging of Jordan. Maha speaks of the ways through which Daffash had shunned his Bedouin heritage and neglected the land as he embraced the seductive city life (79).

Harb dies a physical death, while Daffash dies a metaphorical death, and infects everyone around him. For Daffash, Masaad’s notion of *turath* and modernity presents a struggle, a clash between the two disparate states. He rejects his heritage, “neglects” the land, whilst simultaneously validating his own existence through oppressing Maha, raping Nasra and other women. Faqir paints an image of Daffash the boy, as Maha relates to the reader that even as a child he “stayed at home, hiding behind my mother” (11). In some ways, Maha and Daffash have different qualities; Maha attempts to be an active socio-political agent, although she is a woman, while Daffash is robbed of his masculine agency and is passive, allowing colonialism and capitalism to devour and destroy him. Indigenous patriarchy becomes vulnerable to manipulation by the Imperialists, and as the Eastern man is feminized, he attempts to overcompensate for his masculinity by oppressing native women.

Daffash embodies patriarchy and functions as an oppressor throughout the narrative. When confronted with Maha's pointing gun and Nasra's tearful eyes, Daffash immediately blames Nasra for "tempting" him and "playing tunes on her pipe. It called me to touch her..the pipe is responsible" (12). Nasra is a shepherdess known for playing music on her pipe. Daffash refuses to take responsibility for his own lack of *hasham* and honour. In Bedouin culture, both men and women are regulated and controlled by honour and modesty. If Daffash is established as a rapist, then he lacks honour and fails in maintaining the family's status or as Abu-Lughod eloquently states "lineage honour" (166). Abu-Lughod stresses the concept of honour and morality in *Veiled Sentiments*: "Individuals are guided by...cultural notions of morality and virtue...The system is thus reproduced by the actions of individuals motivated by a desire to embody the good –that which wins respect, confers respectability, and allows for self-respect" (166-67). However, because Daffash rejects his traditions, kinship, and most importantly *turath*, Faqir establishes him as the least moral male figure, straying away from the upheld notion of *turath*. He is a rapist, a puppet of the English and the Turks, and a chauvinist. Daffash defends himself by pointing at Nasra and stating "You stopped struggling and lay back. You enjoyed it" (12). Nasra is unable to respond, but Maha tells him to "Shut up. She's lost her virginity. You know what that means" (12). Maha reminds him of the importance of virginity that he chooses to overlook. In *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo explains that a woman tends to be seen as "sexual temptress" and patriarchal, misogynistic societies attempt to justify rape by blaming the woman for tempting the man. Bordo explains further: "Frequently, even when women are silent...their bodies are seen as 'speaking' a language of provocation" (6). For Bordo, Western societies continue to blame women for the violence that is inflicted upon them. When women are "inaccessible" they are still seen as seductresses and carry the burden of their bodies. Bordo

states: “When these inviting bodies are inaccessible or unresponsive to male overtures, this may be interpreted as teasing, taunting, mocking” (6). Although Bordo is dealing with Western societies, this also applies to Faqir’s *Pillars of Salt*. Nasra is inaccessible, she is dressed modestly, and is not “wearing a miniskirt,” in the terms with which Bordo points out that men acquitted of rape use that excuse (6). Nasra’s melodic tunes “tempt” Daffash, not her clothes or lack thereof. Nasra’s tunes are her only way of asserting herself, her space for creativity, a female space that is only hers, yet the oppressor penetrates that space and takes it away from her.

Not only does Daffash invade both Nasra’s body and creative space, but he also labels her as mad. When Maha points the rifle at Daffash, suddenly Nasra saves Daffash by pushing Maha to the floor: “Two hands grabbed my ankles and I fell down. Nasra!! Nasra? Nasra saved Daffash? Oh, why?” (12) Maha’s shock is evident through the repetition of her friend’s name. Daffash seizes the moment to grab the rifle and screams “I will kill both of you, crazy whores” (12). Maha’s father, Sheikh Nimer walks in and orders Daffash to put the rifle away. Daffash’s response is “I want to put some sense into those crazy women’s heads” (13). Rather than acknowledge his crime, he labels them as madwomen, as it is the easiest thing to do. Faqir foreshadows Daffash’s labelling of Maha as mad and sending her to the asylum. Similarly, Nasra is labelled as mad in her own way, the loner of the village, after the rape incident. Sheikh Nimer reprimands his son, but also informs Nasra that she should “not have tempted him” (13). At this statement, Maha understands the form of oppression that subjugates them as women: “I realized how high were the mud walls imprisoning us. I sat on the floor, pressed my temples with my palms, and started crying” (13). Maha is able to see the harsh reality they are living, and she is able to locate the multiple sites of oppression. On the other hand, Nasra becomes a victim of internalizing the oppressive ideologies that delude her into believing that she is responsible for

Daffash's crime. Bordo argues that "women... frequently internalize this ideology, holding themselves to blame for unwanted advances and sexual assaults. This guilt festers into unease with our femaleness, shame over our bodies" (8). Nasra's internalizing of this ideology is tragic, as she begins to spiral downwards after that incident. Unlike her name, which I mentioned earlier translates into "victory," Nasra's condition is anything but victorious, and her plight is a tragic one. Maha narrates: "Nasra had lost her virginity... The tunes of Nasra's reed-pipe had changed. They lacked the edge they used to have. Poor woman, she thought that by changing the tune she would protect herself" (15). As Bordo states, Nasra's uneasiness with herself manifests itself not only on her body, but also in her music and the tunes she believes had caused her tragedy. Not only does Nasra internalize these patriarchal and oppressive ideologies, but she also saves Daffash and continues to love her oppressor. Daffash nearly rapes another woman, the nameless wife of a man named Saleh. Nasra is the first to come to his aid, as she informs Maha of his whereabouts. Once Maha saves the woman from Daffash, she comments that she (the wife of Saleh) was "an idiot" (66). Daffash excuses his crime, just as he had done before, stating that it "was not rape. She was begging me for it" (67). Maha ponders over the reasons behind Nasra's love for Daffash, the man who "raped her, made her life miserable, and slept with other women... I did not understand" (67). Nasra, similarly to Daffash, who worships the English and the Turks, worships her coloniser, her oppressor. Yet in contrast to that dim reality, the Storyteller narrates the first event as a "planned" action to murder Daffash. He explains that it is Allah who saved Daffash, for "Allah is always wide awake and will always protect His weak worshippers" (30). Faqir employs irony as the Storyteller disfigures the name of Allah and reverses the binaries of strong/weak, labelling Daffash as "weak" while the women are "evil"

(30). The Storyteller never narrates the rape and the oppression of women, as colonialism and patriarchy work hand in hand; he overlooks the suffering and trauma inflicted upon the women.

Daffash's infatuation with and worshiping of the English are exemplified at different occasions, distancing him from any association to *turath* and the land. Maha narrates that when a Land Rover approached the field, "it stopped in the bed planted with radishes and henna. Struck with anger, I ran towards the vehicle waving my fists. Daffash, two painted women, and an immaculately dressed man were in it...Damn Daffash and his city friends!" (33) Maha is attached to the land, to nature, to *turath*, while Daffash is blinded by the colonisers and modernization. He allows for the pollution of the land as well as the rape of the land. He welcomes the colonisers and Samir Pasha: "Welcome, our guests. You are members of the family and our land will be green under your feet" (34). Daffash believes that his life will prosper through cultural contact with the coloniser and the imperialists. Maha, on the other hand, is able to discern the situation and overhears the Pasha's racist comment on a picture of a Bedouin woman. The Pasha is surprised that the woman "is not dark" (34). Maha wants to correct him and inform him that "not all Bedouins have dark skin" (34). However, she does not do so, and suppresses her political agency at this instant. Maha is aware of her brother's assimilated state. He does not attend her wedding: "Daffash left with the two women and his master for the city...He did not stay in his village, even on his sister's wedding" (42). Daffash's rejection of the village and *turath* is evident as he separates himself from his role as brother, as protector, and as the son of Sheikh Nimer, for he is too busy following the coloniser, like "a loyal dog" as Maha describes him (43). The Storyteller's description of Daffash is also useful for characterizing him. The Storyteller observes from a distance, as English men and women, along with Samir Pasha, hold a gathering or what seems like a celebration:

The smell of wine and roasted duck wafted out of half-opened doors...O what I saw! Flickering candles, semi-nude women, and men in black suits. There was only one long robe and a cloak. Who was it? Daffash? Yes, yes. Like her shadow, he followed the English girl who had attended the wedding of his sister Maha. Rose Bell, her name was. She pushed his hand away and danced with Samir Pasha...[Daffash] held the end of his cloak and started dancing the Dhiyya. They all pointed at him and shrieked with laughter (89-90).

Daffash needs the English woman's affection, yet rejects Nasra and the women of Hamia. The cycle of coloniser/colonised, villain/victim repeats itself and extends to relationships between men and women. Daffash behaves as a clown, available for the colonisers' entertainment. When he dances the traditional Dhiyya dance, everyone mocks him. This is one instance when Daffash attempts to embrace his *turath*, and yet he becomes an object for entertainment purposes. Not only does he become an object, but he is also feminized in this scene, his "masculinity" as a Bedouin man and his authoritative power is taken from him; a castration takes place. Césaire's description of colonised men is most apt in diagnosing Daffash's situation: "I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkeys" (178). Daffash behaves like a "flunkey" and does not realize this as he continues to strive for modernization and acceptance from the coloniser: "Daffash twisted his thin moustache...and whispered, 'We just want your approval and acceptance!'" (41). Faqir paints Daffash carefully, choosing to demonstrate his weakness in the face of colonization, his inferiority complex, and his subsequent oppression of women. Ironically, we are informed that "the blonde woman patted him on the shoulder and said, 'You are an open-minded Arab. Not many of them around'" (41).

Daffash is considered “open-minded” and modernized, yet he is the antagonist of the text. His rejection of *turath* makes him lose touch with his identity and his sense of self. The blonde’s statement summarizes the way Daffash is viewed by the colonisers, yet at the same time, he is laughable and an object of entertainment, rather than a subject. In *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan*, Massad considers the way the Bedouin was viewed by the colonisers and the certain appeal the Bedouin continues to possess:

The Bedouins come to form part of the exhibition into which modern European epistemology has transformed the world. Like the great nineteenth-century world exhibitions that formed part of the European colonial project, the world itself...is turned into an exhibition...It is thus that the Bedouin becomes a fetishized commodity...His use value *is* his exchange value as far as the imperial project is concerned (120).

Massad is fully aware of the usage of the Bedouin in socio-cultural as well as socio-political spheres and ideologies. The right type of Bedouin also becomes a tourist attraction, embodying both *turath* and modernity. Daffash is such a Bedouin, a commodity, used by the colonisers and the imperial project. He facilitates access to the otherwise closed private life of the traditional Bedouin and adopts qualities of the coloniser, whilst still remaining inferior, not quite like the coloniser. This is very reminiscent of Homi Bhabha’s analysis of mimicry and colonial relations: “Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage” (122). It comes as no surprise, then, that Daffash’s subjectivity is always awkwardly negotiated; he is unable to find his own sense of self amidst the inner chaos of *turath* and modernity. In concert with the coloniser’s rape of the land, Daffash begins to neglect his land,

the farm, and steals from his own house to give to the English and the Pasha. Faqir's narrative poses the following situation when Maha walks into her father's home one day:

The room was almost empty except for a mattress...The pile of mattresses had disappeared and the walls were almost bare...My father saw the surprised expression on my face and said, 'Daffash lent the mattresses to Samir Pasha'...Say goodbye to the pure wool mattresses...Our cow Halabeh, our horse Mujahid, the two camels, and the two young ones were missing too (77).

The land symbolizes and is an allegory for Jordan. Daffash slowly gives up pieces of his home, parts of his soul, parts of *turath*, in exchange for modernity and a false notion of selfhood. He aims to become modernized, yet he remains oppressive, patriarchal, and unaccepted by the English and Turks as one of them. He remains on the outside, never quite like them, always lacking, always without dignity. When Maha attempts to bring the land back to life, to cultivate it, enrich its soil and cure the "diseased trees," Daffash does not support her and frowns upon her actions. By contrast to their dying land, the Pasha's house is newly built, a "large white house hovered" over the "humble mud houses huddled together" (145). Maha is introduced to the inside of the Pasha's house when she is requested to cook for his guests. Daffash and the Pasha insist that only "a true Bedouin" can cook the traditional "*mansaf*" which is a dish that Jordanian Bedouins cherish as part of their *turath*. Maha agrees to the Pasha's request and her brother's orders. Upon arrival, she is shocked to see the drastic difference between the Pasha's living conditions and the natives. Maha enters the kitchen to cook the food and realizes that the cook is a slave, "bought" by the Pasha, and so is the gardener (156). Her worst realization takes place when she realizes that she has been fooled into cooking for the English: "My hands started shaking...Harb's body was sliced into two halves like the mutton I was cooking" (160). When

she confronts Daffash, he is too absorbed and preoccupied with entertaining the English; “[Daffash] continues smiling at the Englishman...His voice was full of cold anger when he said, ‘What do you want, black widow?’ My chin was quivering as I asked...Are they English” (161). Daffash simply states that the guests are in fact the English, “leaders of the best English tribes” (161). Maha, outraged, states that the English have killed Harb. Daffash answers her in an attempt to manipulate her and impose colonial and imperial ideologies: “Rubbish. These people are not capable of killing a fly” (161). After moments of attempting to compose herself, Maha realizes her brother’s role in deceiving her and his alliance with the English. Maha enters the living room, where all the guests are seated, including English officers, and yells at them for killing Harb, calling them “foreign killers” (162). She takes on a very political role when she stands against her brother, the Pasha, and the English officers: “I spat on the surprised face of the English officer. Total silence...Daffash barked, ‘I will kill you, Maha’” (162). Maha leaves the mansion, traumatized, feeling ashamed for having cooked for the English: “Feeding the people who had chewed on my husband’s flesh. Shame on you, Maha. Curse Daffash and his shameful deeds” (162). Shame, like *hasham*, is directly tied to *turath* and is instilled within the Bedouin through culture, society, and ideological interpellation. Daffash lacks shame and *hasham*, while Maha uses her *turath* to form a politicized action and identity.

Maha’s Socio-political Agency and Female Solidarity

Although Maha’s strength and political agency are exemplified by her refusal to be a slave to the colonisers, her brother Daffash uses his misogynistic and abusive nature to degrade and humiliate her, yet she finds solace and support in her female friends. Faqir illustrates the now heightened clash between brother and sister and the terrain becomes loaded with sexist, racist, and brutal violence towards women. Maha is beaten brutally as Daffash yells at her for

humiliating him in front of his “friends.” Sheikh Nimer walks in and attempts to stop Daffash but is unable to, for Daffash is younger and stronger, and Sheikh Nimer is deteriorating physically. Maha narrates the events of the attack against her body, her sense of self, and the invasion of the maternal:

My father entered the room...and raised his stick. Daffash snapped the stick and started beating me all over my body. I spat blood and saliva over his face...Mubarak’s screams urged me to stand up. I could not. Two of my teeth were lying on the floor. I collapsed and started crying and shouting, ‘Cursed, Slave to the English’...I must protect my breasts to be able to feed Mubarak...I did not know when the beating stopped...Just the hands of Nasra and Hamda trying to unfold my body...The pain of injured flesh started hammering my head. My son. I wanted my son. All the women were gazing at me and weeping (164-65).

The women are Maha’s support system; each one of them immediately tries to revive her, heal her wounds, and assist her in taking care of her son. The women stand together in face of the gender oppression that inflicts all of them. Nasra takes care of Maha, just as Maha had shielded her from Daffash. Nasra holds Mubarak and tries to feed him, and the rest of the women take care of Maha: “They held me like a feather...covered the bruises with bandages and cotton” (165).

Female solidarity and space are inextricably linked to successful political agency, motherhood, and the maternal – yet the paradox lies in the threat of being branded ‘mad.’ Madwomen figures attempt to use feminine space as a site of agency. Maha’s desire to breastfeed her son is directly linked to Kristeva’s maternal. Maha’s connection with her son Mubarak is evident, even at her most heightened experiences of pain, she cannot abject him just

yet. Maha begins to identify herself as Mubarak's mother, he is the extension of herself and of her love for Harb. Mireille Astore's "Art, Autobiography, and the Maternal Abject" examines the way motherhood is interconnected with the abject. Astore explains: "It is in the maternal that the abject is most prominent...Abjection presents itself with the cause-and-effect process: mother's breast milk and infant's feces" (225). Maha's connection with the maternal and the abject is seen both in her relationship to her own mother, the significance of milk, and her protection of her breasts in order to feed Mubarak. Astore explains further: "[The abject] is the site of conflict, crisis, sin, and war. It has no borders...The maternal abject therefore is the entity that resides within the self and the site where the self is in a constant state of negotiating order and disorder" (238). When faced with the endless pain and suffering inflicted upon her, Maha is deeply connected to the maternal, and negotiates her world through that very state of the maternal and motherhood. She is at once, both a child, and a mother, both on the inside and the outside, negotiating a space between "order and disorder" as Astore eloquently states.

Although the maternal space figures as a centre of solace and consolation, Maha is still powerless in the face of patriarchy and colonialism. Maha manages to label her brother as "Slave to the English," identifying the main issue that has created this monstrous Daffash and infected his soul. Maha endures domestic violence at the hands of her brother, not the enemy, not the coloniser, but rather, her own family, someone who has submitted to the coloniser and chosen to defend him. Phyllis Chesler states in *Women and Madness* that psychiatrists and feminists now understand that "chronic, hidden family/domestic violence is actually more, not less, traumatic than sudden violence at the hands of a stranger, or of an enemy during war. We understand that after even a single act of abuse, physical violence is only infrequently needed to keep one's victim in a constant state of terror" (35). Faqir's text dramatizes this very familial

oppression, domestic violence at the hands of a brother, and she carefully positions Daffash as an assimilated puppet of the English. Faqir juxtaposes Daffash's monstrosity with his father's kindness and gentleness; although Sheikh Nimer is the oldest patriarch, the ruler of the house and the Sheikh of the entire tribe, he is not violent, oppressive, nor is he a chauvinist. Sheikh Nimer represents the "true" Bedouin, untainted by pseudo-modernity and colonialism. In fact, because Sheikh Nimer is unable to protect his daughter from Daffash's violence, he retreats into a world of silence and nostalgia. Sheikh Nimer's descent into the past is presented by his refusal to eat and his constant calling for his dead wife. He is disconnected from the present, from reality, and begins to refer to Maha as "Maliha," her dead mother. Maha notices that her father is "shrinking and murmuring all the time" (172). Like Kristeva's semiotic, Sheikh Nimer regresses into a child-like state, where he babbles and utters meaningless syllables. Before he enters that stage, he has a moment where he informs Maha that the land should go to "its ploughman. No, ploughwoman. The land is yours, Maha. This is my will...Daffash does not deserve one span of it" (180). Shortly after Sheikh Nimer's descent into the semiotic and his physical decay, he passes away and leaves Maha to face her brother's wrath.

The Storyteller depicts Maha's connection with the maternal and an impenetrable feminine space as sinful; it is a space that men cannot experience. He easily labels her as a witch who seduces the Pasha and turns him "into a baby crying for milk and attention" (169). Again, the fear of the maternal and the horrors of the maternal are evident, and the only way that this fear is counteracted is by accusing women of madness. The Storyteller presents Maha as a sinner, as a witch, and her brother as a decent, victimized man (170). We are informed that Daffash found Maha in bed with the Pasha: "His sister and the Pasha were lying in bed and sucking each other's blood from opened veins. The Pasha was no more than a skeleton covered

with a thin layer of skin” (170). Faqir juxtaposes the Storyteller’s fabrication of Maha’s victimization with the reality of Maha’s situation, as Maha tells us that “the days sealed the cut in my gums, but did not heal the gaping wound in my heart. Humiliation, anger, and sheer helplessness. The women of Qasim restored the body to its former shape...the heart refused to be mended” (171). Maha’s physical deterioration and the humiliation inflicted upon her body mirrors the pain affecting her emotional and mental state. She is unable to heal, yet keeps reminding herself that she ought to “breastfeed my suckling” (171). Only through the maternal is she able to reside and commit herself once more to political agency and subjectivity. After her father’s death, Maha begins to weave her mother’s unfinished carpet, again, and narrates: “I needed to keep my hands occupied or else I would smack somebody or something” (183). Sister solidarity is once more clearly emphasized, as it is only the women of Hamia who support Maha and attempt to protect her. Nasra, like Maha, is labelled as deviant and mad, yet it is those very “madwomen” that form an alliance against the oppressive forces. It goes without saying that Nasra and Maha are similar to Catherine, Bertha/Antoinette, and Ammu. All of these female mad characters threaten society. Their ability to resist and speak out against patriarchy and colonialism labels them as deviant and dangerous. They are the characters who are silenced and shunned both by indigenous patriarchy and the Imperialists.

Nasra and the other women stand by Maha and support her, informing her that she “must fight. You are the ploughwoman of this land” (201). Daffash realizes that the only way to expel Maha from the land is by forcing her to marry Sheikh Talib. Because Daffash allies with the Imam, Maha is faced with gender oppression, religious oppression, and neocolonialism. The Imam’s role is significant of religious oppression and a manipulation of Islam to fit patriarchal values and demands. The only solidarity she receives is through the women of Qasim, who

advise her that she must run away, to which she replies: “But I don’t want to run away” (204). The Imam, Daffash, Sheikh Talib, and the rest of the men of tribe are shocked when Maha does run away, with the help of Nasra. She spends nights hiding in the mountains with Nasra, until one day she is informed by one of the village’s boys that Daffash has “taken possession of the orchard, the house, and your son” (214). Maha refuses to remain hidden; she refuses her exilic position and decides that she should never have left her land or her son: “What was I, Maha, daughter of Maliha, daughter of Sabha, doing there? How could I leave my son and house? I must fight Daffash” (215). Once again, Maha finds strength and determination in the maternal, through revisiting her past, recalling and reviving her mother and grandmother, and her bond to her son. Maha returns to the village, determined to claim her land, her *turath*, and her son, but is greeted with the Imam, Daffash, the Pasha, and two men dressed in white. The Imam immediately labels her as a “sinner” and orders the village to “Stone the sinner” (216). The children start throwing stones at Maha, but she keeps walking, refusing to stop, refusing to “look back” (216). Daffash screams: “Here she is. Look at her. She is mad. The bee of her brain has flown away....Look at the company she keeps! The mad shepherdess” (216). When Daffash insults Nasra and labels her as “mad,” Maha retaliates and tells him that Nasra is saner than he is. She thinks to herself that Nasra is the best friend who had always supported her: “Nasra was not mad. Nasra was the princess of sane people. Nasra was the herb which had healed most of my wounds. How dare he?” (216).

Nasra is the spirit of Bedouin pastoralism; she is a simple woman, victorious in her simplicity and in her *turath*. Daffash refuses to reason with Nasra or Maha, insisting that Maha is inferior because she is a woman, and because she is “crazy” (217). Maha replies that she will not reason with a rapist, “a disobedient son” and servant “of the English” (217). At that final

accusation, Daffash attacks Maha violently. The women of Hamia try to save Maha, Nasra and Tamam attack Daffash, another woman attempts to strangle him, but these are all futile attempts in the face of religion (symbolized by the Imam), colonialism and neocolonialism (symbolized by the Pasha), and patriarchy (symbolized by Daffash). Maha is tied down by the two men in white, as she is whisked off to the asylum. Children chant after her: “Wizz, wiz..the bee of Maha’s mind flew away...Mad...Mad woman” (218). In the face of religion, patriarchy, colonialism and neocolonialism, there is no chance of escaping combined oppressive factors. Even with national liberation, the oppressive forces remain intact and are able to exile Maha from her home and separate her from her son and the land. The separation is doubly crippling because she loses the motherland, as well as motherhood and her sense of self.

A sense of female solidarity as a tool for resistance becomes embedded in *Pillars of Salt* when Maha meets Hanniyeh, whose name translates into “lucky”, and is also known as Um Saad, or “mother of happiness.” Faqir first introduces Um Saad’s entrance through Maha’s narration: “The noise of a woman shouting abuse had woken me up...she shouted at Salam the nurse and Kukash the porter” (6). Um Saad refuses to share the room with Maha: “What? A filthy Bedouin woman?” (6). Because she is a city-dweller, or from the *Hadar*, Um Saad refuses to be associated with Maha, a Bedouin. Class-consciousness is an issue between Bedouins and *Hadar*. Maha remains calm, ignoring the insults: “I did not open my mouth...I knew Um Saad’s heart was being scalded with the flaring fire of parting. No matter what she said about Bedouins, I would not get cross with her” (6). At the hospital, Maha is able to become an active socio-political agent, at the very least through the support she gives to Um Saad. Sisterly solidarity becomes an important trope in *Pillars of Salt*. To ease Um Saad’s pain after the electrotherapy she receives, Maha feeds her oranges and holds her all night:

I peeled an orange and squeezed the slices into Um Saad's dry mouth...I dipped a pieces of bandage in the glass of cold water and wiped her face, her hands, her legs. Nasra used to wipe away my pain. Where is she, my friend and companion?...If I had spans and spans of bandage I could not have dried the tears of Um Saad that night, her first night in the madhouse. I kept rubbing and drying until the glow of dawn crept into the pale room and she went to sleep (7-8)

Just as Nasra used to support Maha and heal her pain, Maha extends this ritual of healing to Um Saad. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks stresses the importance of building female solidarity and support systems in order for a revolution to take place against capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal and racist oppression. Hooks calls for a politicized feminist movement which can only be truly successful when differences and racism are eliminated. Differences between "white women" and "multi-ethnic women" created obstacles, making it "impossible for the two groups to feel they shared common interests or political concerns" (50). For Hooks, it is necessary to establish a solid ground for a revolution through minimizing differences, stressing commonality, and a real sisterhood. This is not to deny that differences do exist, and hooks is not stating that we need to "eradicate difference to feel solidarity" (67). Hooks outlines the fundamentals of female solidarity:

To build a politicized, mass-based feminist movement, women must work harder to overcome the alienation from one another that exists when sexist socialization has not been unlearned, e.g., homophobia, judging by appearance, conflicts between women with diverse sexual practices. So far, feminist movement has not transformed woman-to-woman relationships, especially between women who are strangers to one another or from different backgrounds (50).

Faqir's fictional narrative provides insight into Hooks' argument. Maha and Um Saad are "strangers" brought together by common humanity. Only at the asylum do the two different women form an alliance and embrace their sisterhood. All class, social, racial, and ideological boundaries are demolished. What is embraced and upheld is their sameness and they are able to put their individual experiences together in favour of the collective. Maha's private life intersects with Um Saad's private life to form the whole, the public sphere, and the collective.

Um Saad's Narrative: The 'Other' Madwoman

The function of Um Saad's character in the text is to embrace sameness and establish female solidarity that cuts across class, race, and ideological boundaries. Um Saad recounts her childhood to Maha, constantly referring to Maha as "Maha, my sister," after she begins to identify with Maha and refrains from shunning her as a Bedouin woman. Um Saad is not as defiant or powerful as Maha, and her experience is similar, yet not identical to Maha's. Her narrative functions as a sort of backdrop against Maha's narrative and the Storyteller's. When Um Saad begins her narrative, we are informed that she is not fully Jordanian, as she is actually the daughter of a Syrian immigrant; her parents immigrated to Jordan to escape French colonization (37). Um Saad's father used to be a rebel, fighting against the French. She tells Maha that "I did not like my father, but I really hated the French who made him restless and dirty" (37). As a child, Um Saad was terrified of her father: "He would keep talking about killing and blood, about explosives and corpses" (36-7). Under the climate of war and colonization, fear is instilled within her and patriarchy is at its strongest. As Um Saad examines her childhood and her life, she has a revelation that helps her understand her tragic life: "Maha, sister, my life is candy-floss; fluffy and full from the outside, empty like this damned hospital room from the inside. And they called the candy-floss 'girl-curls.' It was like my life. A girl's life. A fluffy lie

for half a piaster” (19). Um Saad’s life entails a lost love, a forced marriage, and her husband’s betrayal of her. As a young girl, Um Saad falls in love with a Circassian, Muhammad (101). Um Saad’s father refuses Muhammad’s proposal on the basis that he is a Circassian, and not an Arab. Society and culture, the public forces, separate Um Saad from her love. Her love for Muhammad is considered a transgression in itself (like Catherine and Heathcliff’s love, and Ammu’s and Velutha’s) and she is therefore punished. Um Saad’s parents trick her into marrying an old man, informing her that she is to get dressed and “put make-up on” for a wedding, which she later finds out is actually hers (102). Um Saad suffers at the hands of her husband, who rapes her on her wedding night: “He asked me... ‘have you had your period?’ I shook my head. ‘All the same’ ...if I am really mad, then my brain must have crumbled down that night because I saw a flying cap in the room” (109-10). Um Saad’s body becomes an inscription for pain and suffering, at a very young age, and she continues to live her life oppressed both by the public and the private sphere.

Um Saad is not a “pure” Jordanian, therefore society outcasts her and leaves her stranded on the margins: “People think that I come out of a wall. No family tree or past. So, nobody would propose to immigrants...the dropouts for the outcasts. The refuse for the junk” (123). Although Um Saad belongs to the *Hadar*, she lacks a “family tree or past,” which is a notion directly linked to *turath*. This is unlike the situation with the Bedouins, who have and cling to *turath*. For the Bedouins, *turath* helps shape their individual as well as their collective identity. Um Saad, on the other hand, continues to question her identity and asks Maha: “Can you cast off your identity like dirty underwear? Can you?” to which Maha responds: “Identity? What is identity? I think I have none” (80). Maha lacks the terminology that Um Saad has, because Um Saad has also learned to read and to write, while Maha had not had access to education. Again,

class and cultural differences are evident. In this context, identity is embedded very deeply in *turath*, and Maha refers to herself as “Maha, daughter of Maliha, daughter of Sabha” which glorifies her identity. On the other hand, Um Saad’s life is implicated in modernized Jordan, specifically Amman, which is the capital of Jordan.

Turath is not a central trope in Um Saad’s narrative; on the contrary, it is modernity and the effects of modernization that shape Um Saad’s life in multiple ways. When speaking of Amman’s city lights, Um Saad describes Amman as a “spacious Ottoman prison... Amman has electricity now” (71-2). Maha is confused and remarks that her village has no electricity. Um Saad’s response is insightful: “Darkness is merciful. Light is cruel” (72). Faqir uses Um Saad’s voice as a tool to deconstruct the binary of *turath*/modernization and white/black. She defamiliarizes darkness and lightness, changing their attached connotations. Modernization and the White man are “cruel” while darkness, *turath*, and the pre-colonial age are “merciful.” Um Saad deals with the same tensions that Maha deals with, the present and the past, and attempts to situate herself between the two disparate spheres. Twenty-five years after her marriage, and after the birth of eight sons, she runs into her old love, Muhammad, who had never married. She narrates the mixture of pain and nostalgia that she feels:

Oh he was old and lonely. We grow old. That is the way it goes... My belly was big... my black hair was grey, and my face was wrinkled. I realized then that my youth had passed silently... For Abu Saad, I have been and always would be a slave girl... Abu Saad entered the bedroom and was shocked to see me naked. ‘What happened to your brain, woman?’ (151).

After years of raising eight sons, Um Saad is left facing the consequences of modernity, of city-life, of aging, of nostalgia, and carries resentment regarding her lost youth. The city changes,

emptiness resides in people's hearts: "a devil resided in Amman...Noisy machines filled the air with black smoke and steam" (157).

Just as Maha's land was taken from her by the colonisers and Daffash, Um Saad's city is faced with modernization, neocolonial relations, and globalization. Shortly after independence, Um Saad's private life suffers in light of the Jordan's independence and embracing of Western modernity: "They left our country...The country was happy and free, my sister, but it was the beginning of my slavery" (177). Although the nation has finally gained independence, Um Saad's private life begins to deteriorate. Her husband, Abu Saad, remarries, taking on a second wife, who is younger, more modernized: "She was a young, artificially blonde woman in heels" (178). At this final loss in her life, this degradation, Um Saad is confined to the kitchen, where she starts spending her nights. Even after all of this oppression and pain, her husband decides to commit her to the mental asylum, since he cannot stand her constant wailing and complaining. Similarly to Maha, Um Saad is sent to the mental asylum by her own family, and not a stranger. As Sinno argues:

In *Pillars of Salt*, Umm Saad and Maha are classified as 'insane' mainly because their respective families have decided that institutionalizing them is the easiest means of getting rid of them. Umm Saad's husband is tired of her behaviour towards his second wife, but the novel clearly sympathizes with her rage and justifies it. Similarly, Maha's brother forces her into the asylum so he can usurp her land without having to fight her anymore. In their own voices, both women provide us with their alternative narratives, as they shed light on the contexts in which they were institutionalized. Their eloquence in articulating the injustices surrounding them deconstruct the verdict of madness. In fact, the only thing that seems to threaten their sanity is the madhouse itself (91).

Sinno is correct in her hypothesis that the madhouse actually destabilizes the women's sense of self and "threatens" their sanity, yet it simultaneously manages to provide female solidarity and sisterhood. At the asylum, Um Saad and Maha are subjugated to torturous methods of electroshock therapy, degradation, and oppressive medication which aim to silence them. The English doctor, Dr. Edwards, threatens to "increase the dosage" if they do not "stop talking" (110). Silencing women through tranquilizers and electroshock therapy goes all the way back to witch-hunts, as Chesler historicizes the various "treatments" used against women:

Isolation... shock therapy –al psychiatric techniques –were first practiced by witch-hunters. Although the straitjacket, solitary confinement, brain surgery, and systematic physical violence were traditionally psychiatric treatments, they are now being replaced by tranquilizers, anti-depressants, and shock therapy (163).

Faqir's mental asylum employs all of the above techniques of silencing women, and the oppressor happens to be the English doctor, who has come all the way from England to "treat" them and others. Chesler summarizes the oppressiveness of the mental asylum in simple, effective words: "Mental asylums rarely offer asylum. Both their calculated and their haphazard brutality mirrors the brutality of 'outside' society" (95). Maha and Um Saad attempt to resist and defy the oppressive regime of the mental asylum, which mirrors the oppression of patriarchy and colonization.

In the face of oppressive forces, sisterhood and a revival of the erotic become necessary for survival. Throughout Maha and Um Saad's stay at the asylum, the significance of Lorde's erotic becomes evident. As Lorde explains:

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether

physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference (280).

Although Maha and Um Saad are not exactly sharing “joy”, they are able to work past their class differences and emphasize their commonality and shared experiences. Bedouins and *Hadar* are two distinct social groups; the categories share very little, if anything, in common. The class differences are emphasized in society and culture. When Faqir places Maha and Um Saad in the shared space of the room, the asylum, these social and class differences are eliminated. What emerges instead is a stronger sister solidarity, with potential to subvert the hegemonic powers. Maha and Um Saad form a socio-political alliance against the English doctor and his helpers. They refuse to be silenced and keep talking all night. Throughout their conversations, their stories, their sharing of experiences, talking becomes a tool and ritual for resistance and defiance. Moreover, talking becomes necessary in order to heal, create, and resist subordination. Even when the English doctor increases their dosage, Maha and Um Saad begin to laugh and continue talking, which baffles him: “The doctor loosened the tight collar at his neck and gazed at us, baffled” (110). Only through their rituals of memory, talking, and the sense of touch, are they able to resist their subordination and the hierarchy at the mental asylum.

The construction of Um Saad’s narrative is dependent not only on her memories, but also on two very significant mediums: film and music. Because Um Saad has had access to modernity and city-life, she recalls various films that she has seen, actors and actresses that have affected her, and songs that she has memorized. Um Saad entertains Maha by narrating the events of the films she had watched, the way the characters interacted on screen, and the effects on her sense of self. Faqir’s usage of this technique is very comparable to Manuel Puig’s *Kiss of the*

Spiderwoman. In Puig's narrative, the two main characters, Luis Molina and Valentin Arregui, share a prison cell, for different reasons. Molina is arrested for his homosexuality, while Valentin has been imprisoned for his political activism against the Argentine government. Like Maha and Um Saad, Molina and Valentin must find commonality within their differences. Molina, like Um Saad, refers to films he has watched and tells them to Valentin to pass the time. Also like Um Saad, Molina sings songs that he has heard before. Faqir, like Puig, deploys Mikhail Bakhtin's strategy of dialogism. Michael Dunne's "Dialogism in Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*" examines the narrative technique of Bakhtin's "inserted" genres (122). Dunne explains the concepts of dialogism and polyphony: "Polyphony also enters the novel through Puig's use of music. Since the term *polyphony* is borrowed metaphorically from music, the absorption of popular songs into this novel would probably fail to surprise Bakhtin" (123-24). Similarly, Faqir employs the usage of polyphony through Um Saad's choice of songs. Um Saad interrupts her own narrative in order to insert songs. For instance, while speaking of the abuse inflicted upon her as a child, she suddenly breaks into song: "I will never forget the moustache of my father and his wide black trousers. Two eagles could sit on his bushy moustache. The soothing songs and cries of the night. 'Dark-haired beauty. Oh dark haired beauty. You are the glass, and your lips are the wine'" (79). Um Saad does not explain the significance of the songs she chooses to sing. However, at certain junctures her choice of song seems to emphasize her own reality's cruelty as she laments her losses. When she relates to Maha how she met Muhammad many years later, and the nostalgia that seized her heart, she chooses to sing the following:

Don't say we were and there was.

I wish all of this had not happened.

I wish I had never set my eyes on you (151).

Like Molina, Um Saad is seeking a lost or ideal love, only found in music and the cinema. Dunne describes Molina's infatuation with music, boleros, and the cinema: "The plots...that Molina recounts throughout the novel appeal – as the boleros do – to Molina's sentimentality and his pathetic desire for a world in which lovers live happily ever. Valentin sees himself as more steely-eyed and realistic" (133). Um Saad wishes she "had round hips like Hind Roustom...a beautiful Egyptian actress. Her voice is husky and she wiggles her hips. I had no hips, nothing" (80). Um Saad's infatuation with the actresses of the cinema expresses her desire to be like them, to have their bodies and their voices, to be able to express herself as she wishes. While she describes the films she has watched, the audience is able to discern her desire for the same lifestyle that she watches, the same love, the same idealized courtship by a man: "Farid al-Attrash appeared on the screen and a funny feeling hit me as I had lost the lower part of my body. He sang to Sammiya Jamal...Farid would sing about the sorrows of love...I cried when they did not allow him to see his beloved...I cried and cried when they got married at the end" (49-50). Um Saad, like Puig's Molina, is sentimental and her memories are fused with film and music, false depictions of reality, depictions that do not coincide with her own harsh reality, allusions to fairytales and happy endings that remain out of reach. On the other hand, like Valentine, Maha attempts to be the realistic and rooted subject, who tries to bring Um Saad back from her engagement with music and film, back to her narrative. For instance, Um Saad speaks of the way she was committed to the asylum, and Maha intervenes to correct her:

'They woke me up, threw me in a car, and brought me to this paradise.'

'Um Saad, this is no paradise. It is a madhouse. You must not forget that.'

'Yes Maha. it is a madhouse. Must not forget, must I? Tera-lam-tera-lam. To the madhouse he sent me, he never visited me, me. Beat the drum!'

‘There is no drum here.’

‘Beat anything.’ I started banging the cupboard with both hands. Um Saad’s voice was flawless. I joined in, ‘To the madhouse... he sent me, meee, meee’ (188).

Although at first Maha attempts to remain controlled, calm, and realistic, she cannot resist joining Um Saad and starts singing along.

This dialogism and polyphony are crucial not only at the semantic level, but also at the political level, for it is their songs that infuriate the English doctor and cause disruption within the system. Maha describes his rage: “The English doctor entered the room and started shouting at us in a different tongue, then said in Arabic, ‘Shut up.’ I eyed his steel-blue eyes...then shouted, ‘No, you, shut your foreign mouth’ (188). Maha and Um Saad’s resistance heightens and threatens the status quo. Their sisterly solidarity becomes a socio-political act of subversion of the otherwise rigid institutions, of colonialism, patriarchy, and institutions that discipline and oppress them. Dunne describes Puig’s novel as doing the following: “Overcoming boundaries, socio-political and aesthetic, bridging gaps, meeting the other person as a subjectivity equal to one’s own – these are the stylistic strategies as well as topics of Puig’s *Kiss of the Spider Woman*” (135). Faqir’s text employs the same “stylistic strategies” allowing for a new space to be created, a space for sister solidarity and rebellion. *Pillars of Salt* also employs the insertion of songs within Maha and the Storyteller’s narrative, albeit used differently and for different purposes. For example, when the English leave the village, a song is inserted within the text, and it remains unclear whether it is Maha or the women who are chanting: “Women of Hamia/be happy, be happy/your enemy has departed/be happy” (201). In the Bedouin context and setting, oral poetry and songs are very significant to the *turath*. This contrasts with Um Saad’s usage of popular songs and films, which are a part of modernity and globalization. Both Puig’s and

Faqir's texts situate two characters, from completely different backgrounds, and place them alongside each other in a continuous dialogue which aims to shatter and resist the oppressive regimes they are subjected to. Puig's characters interact in a prison, in one cell that they must share, while Faqir's characters interact in an asylum, also in one room. The prison and the asylum become sites of resistance to the hegemonic order.

Defamiliarization of English and Arabic

Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* draws upon words, phrases, sayings, films, actors and actresses, religious quotations that would be unfamiliar to the Western reader. Um Saad refers to popular songs and film, actors such as Farid al-atrash, Hind Roustom, Um Kalthum, who are extremely popular and rooted within Arab pop culture. To the Western reader, these names have no significance. This is only one example of the process of defamiliarizing the Englishness of the text. Faqir is an Anglophone writer, yet her text is not aimed at a strictly English-speaking audience or a western one. Diya M. Abdo's "How to be a Successful Double Agent: (Dis)placement as Strategy in Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*" is extremely useful for formulating an understanding of Faqir's text as occupying a third space, a space between East and West, between denying native informacy, and writing for a Western audience. Abdo describes this third space: "[the text] inhabits an ambiguous position in its relationship with its audience. On the one hand the text assumes a Western audience; it was originally written in English...on the other, its language assumes...knowledge of the Arabic language and Arab culture" (238). Because the text requires familiarity with Arabic culture, *turath*, popular culture, and at times, Bedouin dialect, it alienates the uninformed Western reader, creating a state of confusion. Faqir uses English, yet defamiliarizes it, infusing it with Arabic proverbs and cultural ideologies, rendering the text as neither fully English nor Arabic. Abdo emphasizes that Faqir's text is "an attempt at

decolonization, of bringing the Arab self into English literature...English cannot be got rid of, but *it* can be colonised by Arabic...the English itself must be changed, fused with Arabic, so that *both* are organically transformed and resisted” (242). This strategy is not purely a linguistic one, it is a political and ideological attempt at decolonizing and critiquing both English and Arabic, both cultures which blend with patriarchal, colonial, racist, and orientalist ideologies. At first glance, the text seems to cater to the Western belief that all Arab women are oppressed and that the Western reader is superior to the “madness” taking place. Abdo explains Faqir’s tactic: “Faqir will have her critique of her own culture, but on her own terms, and not without simultaneously critiquing the West’s representation of her” (243). By employing the misogynistic, Orientalist voice of the Storyteller, Faqir manages to hold a mirror up to the West, exposing its assumptions that tend to overlook and distort Arab women’s realities. However, it is not only the Orientalist voice that Faqir attacks, but also the religious voice. Abdo explains the multipurpose uses of the Storyteller’s voice:

The fact that the novel begins with this intruder’s narrative, which significantly starts ‘Tonight, the first night of Ramadan, the month of fasting and worship’ wherein he will recount to us ‘a horrific story’, equates this foreigner’s narrative with Qur’anic revelation, conveyed during the month of Ramadan to the prophet Muhammad, thus implying that mutilating narratives are not simply national or orientalist, but also religious...either way, his character is an amalgam of any masculine voice that has mutilated, misrepresented or completely buried women’s identities, existences, and narratives (244).

Faqir’s attack on colonialist, religious, orientalist, and patriarchal ideologies is apparent throughout. Even when the women are institutionalized for their alleged madness, the reader is able to fathom that madness is constructed by the dominant and powerful class, by masculinist

powers that work together to oppress and silence women. Faqir's ability to rewrite women's narratives lies in dismantling orientalist, patriarchal, and religious narratives and rewriting new ones. *Pillars of Salt* does not merely cater to the Western reader by exoticizing the East and Eastern women's plight. Abdo identifies the text's ability to "lull, and then pull the rug from under, Western readers, to critique them and bring them face-to-face with oppressive orientalist or colonial discourses" (249). The Western reader is denied agency, denied a superior stance, as even the English language which was once familiar, becomes unfamiliar. This uncomfortable position is significant because "it is comfortable for the Western reader to feel that the oppression the novel's female characters endure comes from their own culture and the men who control it. Less comfortable is the realization, if achieved, that this blatant misogyny comes from a man who is a foreigner and friend of the English" (250-51). The text's ambiguous position between East and West is evident in another example:

By opposing the Storyteller's arguably Qur'anic narrative with Maha's, the text takes on the attractive Western packaging of an anti-Islamic text. The Arab and Muslim audience meanwhile, knowing the meaning of The Storyteller's name, can view his Qur'anic mantle instead as an example of Western misinterpretation and misappropriation of Islam (255-56).

Yet another example of the different understandings of phrases is apparent in the usage of phrases such as "Curse their religion," a phrase Nasra uses when she witnesses Maha's pain and suffering after Hajjeh Hulala attempts to rid her of the evil within her body, to help cure her assumed barrenness (*Pillars* 97). Abdo argues that this phrase is used commonly in Arabic, and does not always refer specifically to Islam. For a Western reader, this is an occasion when the "wronged Arab woman [identifies] the source of her misery as Islam, something the West has

'known' all along and tried to convey to the poor brown woman, who must reject her oppressive culture and name it as evil or backward in order to free herself and join the ranks of the civilized" (257). There is a clear distinction between us/them, for it is "their" religion to be cursed, and not the West's. However, Abdo insightfully points out that this statement could also be "revelatory to the Arabic-speaker who has heard the phrase often and never stopped to really think about it" (258). Whose religion is it? Is it a mutilated religion? In the context of Nasra's objection, Maha is being tortured to be rid of an evil spirit, and therefore, "Nasra can actually be seen as cursing the hedonistic religion of Hulala and Aunt Tamam, which is an aberration of Islam" (258). Both the Western reader and the Eastern or Arabic reader are placed in a third space, unfamiliar to them, uncomfortably ambiguous. The text aims to deconstruct rigid notions of the East and West by creating a third space, inside yet outside. Both readers are always on the periphery. Abdo explains that for the Arabic speaker, the usage of traditional customs, songs, or phrases begins to carry new meaning. She provides the following examples: "The slaughtering of the sheep for example (they forced the sheep to lie on their backs, tied their hind legs together, and cried, 'In the name of Allah' 32), suggests the slaughtering of and violence against women" (262). Another example of the defamiliarization technique appears through Um Saad's revelation about her life: "My life is candy-floss; fluffy and full from the outside, empty like this damned hospital room from the inside. And they called the candy-floss 'girl-curls.' It was like my life. A girl's life. A fluffy lie for half a piaster" (19). The Arabic speaker understands Um Saad's imagery because most have been exposed to cotton candy as "girls-curls," a phrase which is very common, but passes without much thought. If "girls-curls" are meant to be eaten, absorbed, and simultaneously forgotten, as Abdo describes, "melt away, sucked dry, women's lives are as forgotten and as ephemeral as their sweetness and importance in this culture" (262-63). This

displacement is double-fold, for it places the Arabic speaker outside his/her comfort zone, and alienates the English speaker. This strategy is powerfully deployed throughout *Pillars of Salt*.

The Maternal in the Asylum

Although Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* interrogates certain cultural, ideological, orientalist, patriarchal, and even linguistic assumptions, her female protagonists do not manage to escape from the pressures that have led to their exile and annihilation. They are expelled from society only to enter an asylum that mirrors the external society. Public institutions and the public sphere work against them to destroy and disfigure their private lives. Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* emphasizes the coercion of the asylum:

The asylum as a juridical instance recognized no other. It judged immediately, and without appeal. It possessed its own instruments of punishment, and used them as it saw fit. The old confinement had generally been practiced outside of normal juridical forms, but it imitated the punishment of criminals, using the same prisons, the same dungeons, the same physical brutality (252-53).

The physical punishment at the asylum is administered by the English doctor, as these methods of dealing with the insane are transferred from the Empire. The asylum is a modern invention, the medications and the tools are used to physically control and silence the insane. The English doctor, the nurse Salam, and the porter Kukash, all function as disciplinary forces that aim to silence and subjugate the madwomen. Maha recounts the routine of shaving their heads, which the English doctor, along with the nurse and the porter's help, employs:

This is what they do to control us... When the whirr whirr of the tool stopped, when the door was shut, when Um Saad finally uttered a long sigh, I turned my head and opened my eyes. She ran her hands on her bald head. I leapt out of bed, pushed her hands away,

picked up the pink scarf then it around her head, making sure I covered the bald skull completely...[she] started crying like Mubarak when he was one week old and had just been circumcised...I put her head on my chest and the heat of her tears seeped through...My nipples shrank. I wanted to breastfeed my son (208).

It is modernity and colonization that have brought this mental institution to the land, it is this tool which Maha does not comprehend, the tool with a sound of “whirr whirr” that is used to shave their heads, leaving them as dehumanized and as dewomanized as possible. At first, Um Saad refuses to take her scarf off, because men must not see her; this is a part of her *turath* and religion (207). In the face of modernity, *turath* is shunned, disavowed and rejected, and stands a very small chance of resisting the dominant status quo, the power of modernization and globalization. What is there to do, other than extend sisterly solidarity, heal the other, and return to the maternal? Maha and Um Saad only find comfort in each other, in female solidarity, and in the maternal. Maha’s socio-political agency is at its highest and deepest level during her stay at the mental asylum. She reaches out for Um Saad, holding her as one would cradle a child, and unknowingly gains power from the maternal, from Kristeva’s semiotic. This rupture of the symbolic order and the patriarchal laws of society, institutions, and colonialism, is seen at its clearest in the passage mentioned above. Maha and Um Saad manage to make sense of the chaos of the symbolic, the world order, the patriarchal and colonial domination that resides over them, only when they embrace each other and the power of the maternal. Their madness, then, is threatening to both the patriarchs at home and the colonisers. The construction of the two female heroines Maha and Um Saad, who come from two very different backgrounds, is necessary for the argument of commonality and sisterhood in the struggle against patriarchy and colonialism. Maha and Um Saad are both madwomen who function as embodied agents of political and

cultural resistance and they are able to find strength through the maternal and the feminine. Their madness is subversive in its very presence, in its ability to ignite fear and offend both the coloniser and the patriarch.

Chapter Four: Bedouin Madwomen in Miral Al-Tahawy's *The Tent*

The previous chapter explored various dimensions of the term Bedouin as well as Jordanian Bedouin literature. This chapter shifts the scene to Egypt, continuing to explore the 'madwoman' in a Bedouin context through a close reading of Miral Al-Tahawy's novel *The Tent*. Al-Tahawy's novel was published in 1996 and translated to English in 1998; the original text was written in Arabic and entitled *al-Khibaa*. In contrast with the majority of fiction by Egyptian women writers, *The Tent* stands out by dealing with a rural setting, and introducing Bedouin culture and environment to the reader. Not only does Al-Tahawy introduce Egyptian Bedouin culture to a world audience unfamiliar with it, but she also manages to create a space for resistance to a dominant patriarchal order by focusing on a web of female characters and their intertwining lives. Al-Tahawy has dealt with the subject of Bedouin culture and identity in her other texts, including *Blue Aubergine* (2002), *Gazelle Tracks* (2009) and *Brooklyn Heights* (2012). *Blue Aubergine* examines a young woman's reconciliation of her Bedouin heritage with the modern world, *Gazelle Tracks* focuses on a young woman's preoccupation with discovering her mother's past and the tribe's loss of power amidst modernity, and *Brooklyn Heights* deals with a diasporic theme and the protagonist's sense of displacement in New York. For the purpose of this project's focus on mad female protagonists, I have chosen to work with *The Tent*. It is the only one of Al-Tahawy's works that deals explicitly with madness in a Bedouin context. The text presents us with the figure of the Bedouin madwoman in a tent and the external factors she must deal with. In *The Tent*, madness figures as a consequence of an oppressive Bedouin culture affected by colonial relations, as in Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*. The protagonist, however,

unlike Maha and Um Saad, does not end up in a mental asylum, but she becomes physically disabled and mad. Both her madness and physical disability leave her marginalized and exiled within her home, the tent. The protagonist, Fatima, is left with a physical disability that casts her as an invalid, and yet there is power within her disability and madness.

Al-Tahawy's text is relatively new; she arises from a new generation of Egyptian writers whose focus differs from earlier Egyptian fiction. Hoda Elsadda explains in *Arab Women Writers*: "We find in writing of the 1990s a language concerned with the small details of women's lives – details for whose importance generations of women fought to win recognition. These are details that were largely ignored during women's attempt to belong to the world of men" (Elsadda 141). During and after the 1990s, Egyptian female writers had shifted their focus to women, to writing for and about women in patriarchal societies, paying attention to the intricate details that make up Egyptian women's experiences. The majority of Egyptian literature during the 1990s dealt with urban classes and society's expectations of and demands on women. Close attention was paid to the individuality of women and the social, cultural, and political factors that "quash the self and distort its identity on the individual, social, domestic, historical, and political level" (Elsadda 143). Women writers were able to focus on the private lives of Egyptian women in relation to the public and spatial politics. As a result, identity politics and formation emerged as one of the main themes of the literature of the time. However, Bedouin identity politics was not explored until Al-Tahawy's novel in 1996. Al-Tahawy explored a segment of society that had previously been left uncharted in Egyptian literature. Her text was able to address and create a new understanding of Egyptian Bedouin lifestyle while examining the individuality of the Bedouin alongside the collective. Even more specifically, Egyptian Bedouin women, in Al-Tahawy's texts, were granted a voice with potential for subversion.

The Tent examines a network of relationships between women and their surroundings, their oppressive realities and the tensions that threaten to disrupt their sense of self. Elsadda devotes a specific section of her summary of Egyptian women's fiction to Al-Tahawy's work in which she considers the text an initiation into a different environment, a lens into Bedouin culture and the dynamics of Bedouin women's subjectivity and the hierarchies which govern their lives. Al-Tahawy gives voice to Egyptian Bedouin women, singling them out from the majority of urban Egyptian women. Elsadda describes the novel's setting and addresses the main issues which Al Tahawy's text presents:

Al-Tahawy takes us to the world of the Bedouin, to explore untrodden places in women's fiction...we plunge into this old-new world, where the severity of reality intersects with the vastness of myth and we feel the contradictions of oppression, alienation, and resistance. We see things through the eyes of Fatima, her 'father's gazelle', who stands by helplessly as her own gazelle, Zahwa, is slaughtered and roasted. She created an imaginary world where she finds refuge from the harshness of her tyrannical grandmother and her persistent reproach of Fatima's mother for giving birth to evil –that is, to girls. Fatima seeks protection in her father, but his relationship with her mother –'the madwoman' as her grandmother calls her – remains inexplicable to her...She seizes upon the arrival of Anne, a foreigner who has come to study the lives of the Bedouin and acquire Arabian horses...Fatima loses her leg and becomes lame in reality; her sense of alienation and psychological lameness –becomes a tangible defect visible to all...Anne and her friends watch her, and she decides to return home, where she meets the fate of her 'deranged' mother, who lives in a world adjacent to, but outside the borders of the collective (145).

There has been very little, if any, scholarly research that directly addresses *The Tent*, apart from Elsadda's brief analysis. However, Al Tahawy's novel carries tackles an altogether new area, as Elsadda suggests with her term "untrodden." Like Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*, the text deals both explicitly and implicitly with patriarchy and colonialism while attempting to negotiate a space for women's agency and subjectivity within a harsh Bedouin society. Al-Tahawy weaves the themes of madness and disability into the text, calling into question the definitions of femininity, disability, and society's exclusion of the disabled and "madwomen." Through a complex arrangement of social, colonial, and ideological factors which threaten to obliterate Bedouin women's sense of self, Al-Tahawy identifies the struggle of preserving sanity in the face of a patriarchal culture which leaves women excluded from both the public sphere and expelled from within their own private spheres. The private sphere, in this context, is the tent itself, the women's domain, but even within their own space hierarchies and power relations do exist. The tent, or the private domain, mirrors the public domain in its reinforcement of power relations, hierarchies, and ideological constructions that constrain women within certain definitions of womanhood.

Anthony Calderbank, translator of Al-Tahawy's *The Tent*, stresses the importance of reading the text within its context, bearing in mind its position as a text translated from the Arabic language to English:

The English language lacks the grammatical and morphological devices to express the feminineness that the Arabic language enjoins upon this text. There is no 'women's nun al-niswa' in English, no feminine plural endings, no feminine nouns and adjectives, and it hard to recreate the scent of women that permeates the Arabic original of *The Tent* (viii).

Calderbank identifies “nun al-niswa” which roughly translates into an alphabetical letter “nun” which in the Arabic language is added to the end of words to refer to women; “al-niswa” translates into “women.” As a result, the translated version attempts to retain an element of Arabic femininity and Calderbank is clearly aware of the significance of this linguistic ploy. Throughout the text, he strives to relay the feminine aura that envelops the characters and the plot. Al-Tahawy not only writes the feminine but since her text bears marks of modernism and experimentation with narrative form, she also employs a stream-of-consciousness technique, in which the thoughts of the protagonist, Fatima, are constantly being exposed to the reader, muddled and unclear. The line between reality and fantasy is blurred through Fatima’s narrative as she struggles to make sense of her environment. Al-Tahawy’s text is an example of what Hélène Cixous advocates in *The Laugh of the Medusa*. For Cixous, writing by women for women and about women is of the utmost necessity to create a space for women to renegotiate a sense of pride and self. Al-Tahawy’s text does just that – it manages to speak to women, for women, and about women. Cixous urges women to “write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth” (2013). As such, Al-Tahawy employs the usage of stream of consciousness through the character Fatima’s relaying of the events and her thoughts concerning her parents. Al-Tahawy’s text carries a sense of femininity, especially when the Arabic language clarifies this point which is reminiscent of Cixous’s poetic meditation upon a feminine style of writing:

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist... It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatism, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate (2046).

The Tent is in every sense a representation of a feminine text, a feminine style of writing, a text written by a “peripheral” figure, a Bedouin woman who, on a larger scale, writes against patriarchy and colonialism, as will be evident in this chapter’s textual analysis. On a more precise level, Al-Tahawy deals specifically with the female body, the regulation and discipline of the female body, and the intersection of disability and madness. Fatima is both physically disabled and mad, and her protest is through the body and subversion of normalcy.

The text itself is a symbol for an emanation of the female body, which grounds the text as a tent peg does a tent, as stated in the epigraph of the novel “to my body: a tent peg crucified in the wilderness.” The female body is thus best grasped as the tent peg, the smallest unit in the physical structure of the tent, but perhaps the most significant one; the peg bears the weight of the entire tent and holds it in place. Not only does Al-Tahawy create a tent filled with women characters, but she also recreates the figure of the madwoman. Fatima’s mother is considered mad and dangerous and as Fatima grows up, she descends into madness too, following her mother’s footsteps. Cixous discusses women’s vulnerability and hysteria as follows:

Muffled throughout their history, they (women) have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts. And with such force in their fragility; a fragility, a vulnerability, equal to their incomparable intensity... They have furiously inhibited these sumptuous bodies: admirable hysterics who made Freud succumb to many voluptuous moments impossible to confess... haunting him with their inaudible and thundering denunciations (2049-50).

As Cixous describes it, these “inaudible denunciations” are most threatening to the public domain. Fatima’s mother is a silent madwoman, a woman who goes through an “aphonic” revolt which affects both the private and public sphere. Her silence disturbs and unsettles the

household, creates a sense of grotesqueness in the tent, and she is feared and pitied simultaneously. Similarly, as the novel draws to an end, Fatima chooses to remain silent even when spoken to. Like her mother, she is labelled as a madwoman, but Fatima's body takes this revolt one step further: she is disabled and unable to walk, which further exemplifies her state as woman, as a tent peg, as a "body crucified." For Cixous, the figure of the mother is always within woman herself, there is always a correlation between woman and woman, mother and daughter. Al-Tahawy's characters are interconnected, women within women, Fatima merges with her mother and her mother's madness becomes her own. Cixous explains this merging of/with women:

There always remains in woman that force which produces/is produced by the other – in particular, the other woman. In her, matrix cradler; herself giver as her mother and child; she is her own sister-daughter... The mother too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was 'born' to her (2044-45).

Al-Tahawy's *The Tent* is a return to the body, a reclaiming of the female body, specifically the Bedouin woman's body. Through her feminine writing, through her female characters, Al-Tahawy "return[s] in love the body that was 'born' to her." Cixous urges women to write "in body... women are body. More body, hence more writing" (2050). Rather than focus on the significance of the mind and place the mind at a higher level than the body, Cixous dismantles the dichotomy of the mind/body. In the same manner, Al-Tahawy exposes the power of the mind and the body, setting mental derangement and physical disability as equally alienating, yet eventually both disabilities function as a reclamation of the mind and body.

Bedouin Space and Women:

The tent's clear division of male and female space is crucial for situating the distinction between public and private spheres. The female space is also the private sphere, hence the "forbidden place." Al-Tahawy's *The Tent* symbolizes this distinction between male and female space, emphasizing the segregation between the sexes and the network of relationships between women that take place within that space. In *Bedouin Life and the Egyptian Wilderness* Joseph J. Hobbs provides an anthropological account of his interaction with the Ma'aza Bedouins who live in Egypt's desert. Hobbs helps situate Egyptian Bedouins, who, although similar to Jordanian Bedouins, still preserve certain specificity about them as a collective group. Egyptian Bedouins occupy "a small portion of a vast arid landscapes spanning northern Africa and southwestern Asia" (1). Hobbs also describes the tent:

The classic Bedouin black tent, or 'wool house' (bayt ashsha'ar) is made of goat wool or a blend of goat and sheep wool...It is divided into two sections: that for men, the *sh'ig*, on the right as you face the tent: and the *muharram*, the 'forbidden place' for women, on the left (51).

The tent is not simply part of the physical Bedouin setting; it represents the hierarchies and segregation between women and men. The tent does not necessarily denote a family home, but rather, it is a house – a dwelling place. Home, for Bedouins, extends to the entire desert: "The Bedouins perceive their desert as the 'centre of the universe.' This improbable sense of security in the wilderness is largely a result of the social solidarity and practical benefits provided by the nomad's kinship system" (Hobbs 6). The desert is not only the home, but the idea of family and tribe assists the creation of a sense of solidarity amongst tribal members. Hobbs explains the concept of family and lineage in Bedouin society:

Most nomads identify themselves by the patrilineal descent system: both women and men carry their father's name as surname and trace their genealogies exclusively through their fathers' fathers, all the way back to the man whom all members of the tribe recognize as their progenitor...The tribe...is the largest kinship unit the Bedouins acknowledge" (6).

This sense of family and tribe evolves through a clear association between patriarchy and male figures who perpetuate this sense of solidarity. In *The Tent*, Al-Tahawy criticizes this stress on the importance of male heirs and family members; the lack of a male heir causes trouble within the household as it threatens the continuation of the patrilineal lineage.

The Protagonist's Familial Relations and Environment

The Tent is narrated by Fatima, one of the daughters of the Sheikh. Fatima lives with her three sisters, Safiya, the eldest sister, Fouz and Rihana, the remaining two. Fatima's unnamed mother is confined to a room in the tent, and Fatimah's Grandmother, Grandmother Hakima, whose name translates into "Wise", continues to tyrannize over Fatima, her mother, and her sisters. Al-Tahawy establishes Fatima's relationship with her sisters by allowing her space to express her alienation and difference, for Safiya is the eldest, and "exactly like my mother, except that she was larger and more radiant, or perhaps my mother had been like her before her spark went out...Fouz and Rihana lay in each other's arms, sharing their secrets...even in their sleep they had secret conversations I could not join" (2). Immediately, the reader becomes aware of the lack of a sense of belonging, as Fatima states: "I thought of running away again" (2). A sense of imprisonment remains present throughout the text. Al-Tahawy first introduces Fatima's mother, the "madwoman" as perceived by the protagonist:

It would be a morning like all previous mornings, full of tension and anxiety. Either my mother wouldn't open the door of her room, or, if she did open it, she would watch us

with apprehensive eyes. Her pale, emaciated figure, the thin veins on her eyelids, and her nose swollen from floods of tears, choked my heart with sadness (3).

A dark and tense environment is created, setting the stage for the madwoman to enter. Fatima's mother is constantly confined to her room, excluded from all action that takes place outside of her zone. She receives her food on a tray that is delivered to her room, "my mother's door was closed. Safiya opened it slowly...Sasa followed her with a covered tray...I crept into the room and saw the exhaustion in her helpless eyes. I moved closer and the sight of her filled me with pity" (4). Fatima's relationship with her mother is very significant to the development of her characterization. Fatima's mother's despair and madness weigh [s] heavily on her as she tries to rationalize and understand her mother's actions and lack of availability and presence. The boundaries between mother and daughter exist, however; they are no longer permeable. Fatima's mother is part of her world, yet she is beyond reach. As a child, Fatima is still in need of her mother and strives to find her amidst the chaotic nature of their overlapping private worlds. At certain moments, the nurturing character of Fatima's mother is implicitly relayed: "She cupped my face in her hands and burst into tears. I fled from the room, from the stench of her tears" (4). They are unable to merge their inner and outer worlds together, which ultimately creates a fracture within Fatima's sense of self and perpetuates a necessary detachment from the mother. Fatima does not wish to separate from her mother and longs for her affection, constantly looking for an explanation for her mother's absence in both her life and the private sphere. Her mother's confinement unsettles Fatima and creates traumas that are not dealt with even as she grows older. Fatima's mother is separated from the household, confined to her bedroom. Her existence threatens the rest of the household, yet her daughters are constantly reaching out for her, entering the room where she is left to reside [in].

As Julia Kristeva explains in *Powers of Horror* it is that very threat of intermixing or the collapse of boundaries that is feared:

The power of pollution (the threat of illness or death through the conjunction blood-fire) thus transposes, on the symbolic level, the permanent conflict resulting from an unsettled separation between masculine and feminine power at the level of social institutions. Non-separation would threaten the whole society with disintegration (78).

The clear division between the masculine and the feminine is evident in the tent, and even more so, between sane/insane, safe/dangerous. Upholding the dichotomies is as important as keeping the tent in place. Like the previous texts discussed, the threat of dissolution of boundaries remains persistent. In the Brontës' work, there was a preoccupation with preserving boundaries between Self/other, West/East, male/female, health/illness, sanity/insanity. Roy's *The God of Small Things* presented dichotomies through the Caste system and colonial relations; and Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* dealt with East/West and sanity/insanity explicitly. Al-Tahawy's text is also interested in the dichotomies and boundaries between Self/other, East/West, illness/health, ability/disability. One specific example is the boundary between self/(m)other; Fatima's relationship with her mother is problematic and the boundaries are constantly blurred and transgressed. As the narrative progresses, Al-Tahawy provides more insight into the relationship, or lack thereof, between Fatima and her absent mother. In particular, one scene clarifies the mother-daughter dynamics at stake:

“Are you asleep, Mother? Are you asleep?” She didn't answer and I jumped up beside her and some of the milk spilled. I crossed my legs and some more milk spilled. I crossed my legs again and started to eat. She raised her head and looked toward me.

“Are you sleepy, Mother?” She didn’t answer but I saw her swollen eyes staring at me.

“Why are you crying?” I asked, and her weeping turned into violent sobbing. I jumped down off the bed as quickly as I had jumped up and closed the door behind me (20).

Al-Tahawy uses two devices: the first is the usage of repetition. Fatima asks her mother persistently if she is “asleep” or “sleepy.” She awaits a response from her mother who behaves as a mute, responding only with tears. The second device is used when Al-Tahawy inserts milk into the scene. The spilling of milk is closely related to the connotation of the mother’s milk, the maternal. Milk, for Kristeva, is an important binding element between mother and child. For Kristeva, milk “mingles two identities and connotes the bond between one and the other...a medium that is common to mother and child, a food that does not separate but binds” (105). Al-Tahawy deploys the spilling of the milk tactfully. As Fatima awaits her mother’s interaction with her, as she waits for a response, the milk continues to spill. The bond between them begins to break, there is slippage, and there is a sense of abjection taking place, a departure from the mother’s body. In line with the milk image and the idea of abjection, we can postulate that a “dietary abjection” takes place, but nevertheless linked to the maternal and the mother. Kristeva further explains: “The existence and degree of abjection are thus predicted on the very position of the logic of separation” (107). Given the dynamics of the relationship between Fatima and her mother, a sense of separation from the mother must take place. The mother is the abject, the one Fatima fears, yet loves, is repulsed by, yet is constantly intrigued by her tears and her existence or lack thereof. Also, sleep does not come easily to Fatima, she is unable to feel safe or secure:

I closed my eyes, but sleep would not come. In fact I became more restless...I was afraid of the darkness and the silence...I crept out of bed...I wanted to go out...I went to her room. Would it be silent or filled with sobbing? She was crying. Even in the darkness she

cried. Night and day did not exist for her, only darkness and sobbing then complete silence. I went back to bed (24).

Fatima searches for a place outside the darkness, a place of security and comfort, the mother's embrace. She enters the room her mother resides in, the room that is considered outside the margins, and a place that threatens to pollute and challenge sanity or one's safety. Fatima finds her mother yet again in the same grotesque situation and affirms that her mother has lost touch with "night and day" and reality.

Al-Tahawy's positioning of Fatima's mother as a madwoman, outside the margins of reason and sanity, in opposition to the masculine headquarters of the tent, left to live on her own, is not arbitrary. Although Fatima's mother is separated from the rest of the family, so as to not to pollute or contaminate others, Fatima still manages to climb into bed with her, try to understand her, and always ends up running away as her mother sobs indefinitely. This escape is best elaborated upon in *Powers of Horror*, as Kristeva states: "Fear of the uncontrollable generative mother repels me from the body; I give up cannibalism because abjection (of the mother) leads me toward respect for the body of the other, my fellow man, my brother" (79). At this point, Fatima begins to lose her faith in her mother or her mother's return to reality. As a result, Fatima turns to her father and begins to idealize him. He becomes the object of affection and admiration.

Al-Tahawy's description of the father figure is crucial in her text. He is the Shaikh of the tribe, the man of the house, the father who is idealized by Fatima, the husband of the madwoman, and the son of Grandmother Hakima, who acts as the matriarch of the family. As readers, we are not informed of Fatima's father's name. He remains a presence constantly referred to as "he" or "him" (5). The Shaikh is not always present at the tent as we are told he has matters to attend to. His return both confuses and pleases Fatima:

He never came back except to leave again, and when he left he stayed away for a long time. Had he really come back? He was back. I thought, should I run toward him?

‘Greetings! How’s father’s little gazelle?’ The igaal around his head...his long nose...nothing had changed. I looked at him...He kissed me many times...I went back inside to look for him, but I couldn’t find him. Only the sound of sobbing came from her room. His return always made her cry.

‘Why doesn’t she love him like I do? Why doesn’t she ever leave the dark room?’ (5-8)

The father’s return upsets the mother; there is a hint at an underlying issue, that perhaps he is one of the main factors causing her bouts of madness. Also, the reader becomes aware of the intimate relationship between father and daughter. Fatima worships and loves her father, whilst harbouring feelings of resentment towards her mother, who both fascinates and repulses her. The mother becomes the figure that Fatima needs to abject, to separate from, for not only is she constantly crying, but it is the beloved father who makes her cry – and how can he? Al-Tahawy uses the pronouns “him and her” rather than father and mother in order to emphasize the boundaries between masculine and feminine, and to see the two outside their parental roles, as man and woman – the clear separation in Fatima’s head. In “Body Matters”, Lynne Segal explains the child’s relationship to the mother’s body as follows:

The mother’s body, having been everything to the child, threatens its engulfment.

On this view, entering the symbolic space of language brings with it a horror of (and fearful attraction to) everything without clear boundaries, everything which suggests a non-distinctiveness between inside and outside [”] (109).

Fatima does not wish to be engulfed by the mother, and unconsciously opts to be engulfed by the father’s embrace, his kisses, and his presence, no matter how overpowering it is. The boundaries

between mother-father relationships are blurred, the differences between self/other, and Fatima/m(other) become unclear. Her questioning of the lack of love her mother feels for her father is persistent and poses as an issue. She is unable to deal with both parents and her strong feelings for them. In “Strangers to Ourselves” Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan explain:

Splitting is a way of dealing with anxiety by dividing the object of anxiety in two, one bearing all the negative feeling while the other embodies all the positive feelings one wishes to substitute for the anxieties the object or situation provokes. Children, may, for example, direct all of their aggression or hostility toward one parent while idealizing the other, and such splitting may be as much a response to the trajectory of their own drive energies as to external parental behaviour (390-91).

The protagonist endures the process of splitting – she harbours anger towards her mother and intense love for the father figure. Fatima is not yet an adult, yet we are unaware of her exact age, but she is considered the youngest, her father’s favourite as she is not yet a grown-up. The reader is able to infer her age from her father’s speech, his differentiation between Fatima and her older sisters: “Fatima, they’ve grown-up. When they were little I used to carry them on my shoulder, like you” (6). She is still a child, insofar as she has not reached puberty yet to make her a “woman” whose relationship with her father would differ. The only man she interacts with is her father. He is the only “he” in the text, the only male figure whose presence both fascinates and threatens the protagonist’s sense of self and identity. She possesses intense feelings towards her father and yet is unable to let go of the mother, for the mother figure is not quite there, but also not truly gone. At the same time, Fatima is a Bedouin girl in a patriarchal society that regards all females as women, regardless of age; they face the same prohibitions that older women do. As a result, Fatima is not allowed to leave the tent or intermingle with others outside the private

domain. All she has is the tent and her own imagination: “My head went round and round, looking for a way to escape” (Al-Tahawy 5). This statement is presented to the reader very early on in the text, foreshadowing the protagonist’s descent into madness, which I shall refer to later on in this chapter. The protagonist of *The Tent*, Fatima, remains preoccupied with establishing a sense of self or identity very early on in the text. She creates her own world, where she speaks to imaginary characters, escapes the tent through her thoughts and is finally believed to be as insane as her mother was. There is very little room for her to establish successfully a sense of self, and stability is not within reach, given the parent-child tensions at work, patriarchal attitudes and oppression, and finally, the effects of the female coloniser, Anne, who further adds to Fatima’s alienation from herself.

Al-Tahawy does not depict Fatima’s father as the antagonist, the patriarch, the force that employs unjustness and oppression. On the contrary, he is depicted as a gentle fatherly figure, at times meek, incapable of standing up to his mother, Grandmother Hakima. Unlike the father and mother figures, Grandmother Hakima is given a name, identifying her as a significant character in Fatima’s life, personalizing her character, rather than referring to her as “she” or “her.” In Bedouin culture, patriarchy is unquestionably a dominant feature. The head of the household is the patriarch, the father figure, who pursues business affairs outside of the home, accumulates wealth and land, in order to care for and protect the family. This description applies as a general rule to the smallest unit of the tribe, a patriarchal family. However, Al-Tahawy exposes the other side of patriarchy in a Bedouin society, a side that is not usually brought to the attention of Western readers or those readers unfamiliar with Bedouin culture and hierarchies. To an outsider, the Bedouin man is stereotyped as dominant, domineering, oppressive, and the main cause of Bedouin women’s subordination. This description is dangerously limited and limiting; it

does not acknowledge the multiple factors that oppress Bedouin women, and does not take into account women's relationships with other women. For precisely this reason, Al-Tahawy is concerned with a network of relationships between women and posits the father figure as secondary, and at times, marginal. He functions only insofar as Fatima's vision of him allows him to be; his character is necessary to the protagonist's development, at least in psychoanalytic terms. Similarly to Faqir's depiction of Harb in *Pillars of Salt*, Al-Tahawy attempts to alter a perhaps preconceived notion of the Arab man, and even more specifically, the Bedouin man. Her description of the father is crucial to understanding this shift from the stereotypical image of male domination. He is the Shaikh of the tribe; peasants and slaves would worship him; however, his behaviour changes upon dealing with Grandmother Hakima and older women:

They would hurry up to him and bow their heads; then they would touch the tips of his fingers and, in an act of submission filled with supplications, they would kiss and kiss, and he, with his head held high, seemed not to heed them at all. When all the commotion died down, he would enter the house, with the slaves bringing the baggage behind him. He would find her lounging on the verandah, surrounded by the old women...he would sink to his knees and kiss their wrinkles hands...and from maternal aunt to paternal aunt his genuflection would continue (32).

The narrator/protagonist watches her father carefully and notices his gentle and respectful nature. She describes his shift from the public image of himself to the more privatized self. The father deals with the public very differently, he has a certain image to maintain and his Shaikh status must remain upheld, unhindered.

However, upon entering the tent and facing his mother, the true matriarch, the Shaikh is now in his mother's domain: the private sphere. As a result, his behaviour alters to fit the private

realm, the women's domain, and he acknowledges the different hierarchy that applies. It is crucial to note that seniority is a determining factor – for these are older women, not younger women, and certainly not children. Fatima notices how her father, ever so grand and proud, changes his behaviour upon dealing with his mother: “He sat in front of her meekly. It was as if I had never seen his chest swollen with pride, or the people move aside in awe as he walked past” (9). Al-Tahawy shatters the image of the stereotypical Bedouin man, or Arab man. This tactic is very reminiscent of what Brinda Mehta refers to as “politics of rupture” in *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (264). Mehta explains:

Arab women writers have consequently been faced with the challenge of adopting a politics of rupture in their writings to break new ground for geographically specific subjective and politicized reclaiming of self and culture. These writers associate writing with a form of creative dissidence...the explosive and transformative power of the written word demonstrates how a revolutionary politics and poetics of writing becomes a prerequisite for change by ‘deorientalizing’ Arab women from Western and patriarchal mediations, while initiating an internal progression toward selfhood (264).

The Tent deals with Bedouin culture, a very specific and distinct Arab culture, and attempts to dismantle preconceived notions of Bedouin men and women and their interactions. It is not simply the father figure who is the oppressor. Bedouin men are not simply to blame for the subordination of Bedouin women; the issue at hand is far more complex and multifaceted. The general connotations of Arab/Muslim/Bedouin men are that they are oppressive and women lack any ability to subvert that power. This ideology has been transferred and applied by the West, as far back as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. de Beauvoir writes: “When the family and the private patrimony remain beyond question the bases of society, the woman remains totally

submerged. This occurs in the Moslem world...there is no power to check that of the patriarchal chief" (115). Given the common and prevailing notion of patriarchal Arab/Bedouin cultures, Beauvoir makes a powerful assertion, lumping the "Moslem world" together, regardless of any specificities, for as long as there is a private family structure, then as de Beauvoir claims, the woman is "submerged." While this is partly true, what Al-Tahawy does is rupture that very monolithic notion. She presents the reader with an alternative vision, a different take on patriarchy and its upholders. The terrain of patriarchy becomes more loaded, filled with opposing ideologies and inconsistencies – how is the father not the only patriarch? Who is to be held responsible for the women's oppression in a Bedouin culture, and in *The Tent*?

The father figure is somewhat helpless in contrast with the powerful matriarch, Grandmother Hakima. Al-Tahawy creates a memorable character; Grandmother Hakima embodies patriarchal values, oppressive ideologies, whilst at the same time rupturing normative hierarchies of power and authority. As such, Grandmother Hakima is described through the protagonist's eyes. It is worth noting that the first description of Grandmother Hakima is presented through a child's perspective. The text functions as a *Bildungsroman*, progressing, or even failing as the narrator grows older. At first glance it may seem as though *The Tent* is a counter-*Bildungsroman*. Stella Bolaki's *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* examines the usage of the term *bildungsroman* in literary criticism and opens up debates of its function and inclusiveness as a form. She clarifies the goal of her study as follows:

One of the aims of this study is to open more space for debate around the *Bildungsroman* by examining its intersection with life-writing forms and narratives that seem unable to coexist harmoniously with it: those of trauma, illness and death are the most obvious, but I also discuss various instances of marginality, enforced silence, and hampered

movement. Yet, it would be a mistake to see the texts as failed or counter-*Bildungsromane*. They go against some of the fundamental assumptions of the genre but also gesture towards their own ‘art of living.’ Therefore their subversive potential should not be seen merely in relation to the deviations from the genre’s formal conventions (13).

I would argue that *The Tent* functions as a female, Bedouin *Bildungsroman*, encompassing the themes that Bolaki mentions in her understanding of the interactions of the *Bildungsroman* with female novels of development. One of the major themes that Bolaki considers is the “mother-daughter plot” (13). Like Ammu’s and Rahel’s in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Fatima’s relationship with her mother as well as her grandmother is an integral part of her development and her sense of identity. Grandmother Hakima is introduced in the text immediately following the father’s appearance:

It was Grandmother Hakima who was coming in now. She too had the main gate opened for her...She was thin, lighter than him (father). Gold-capped teeth shone in her mouth and it looked like the mouth of a demon...Only the cloak, which she alone among the women, wore, was ever different. Was she really a woman? She was the mother of us all. Our great demon mother who wrapped herself in men’s scarves...Safiya was the first to rush up and kiss her hand. The rest of the household followed suit and she haughtily extended her black wizened hand to each of them. Her eyes probed everything around her...I watched her from the distance. I didn’t like her. With that stick she used to probe her mare, she would poke about in everything: in my sisters’ cupboards, the chests in the storeroom, the jars of butter and cheese (7-8).

A physical description of Grandmother Hakima differentiates her from the father, she is thinner and frail. Nevertheless, she is not marginalized because of her gender and age, it is quite the

opposite. The narrator wonders whether she is “really a woman” and is afraid of her.

Grandmother Hakima establishes her presence very early on in the text, setting herself apart from the other women. Even her dress-code differs, for according to traditional Bedouin attire, a cloak is reserved only for men. Her choice of clothing is based on a desire to assimilate with men and become one of them, rather than be categorized as part of the women. Grandmother Hakima’s identity is built on difference rather than sameness. Her position on the social ladder within the tent is based primarily on a clear distinction between self/other, men/women, old woman/younger woman. As such, there is a clear dichotomization at work in order to maintain hierarchies. Although Fatima understands her grandmother’s powerful nature, she also describes her as a “demon mother” (7). The choice of words is neither coincidental nor arbitrary; the paradox is evident.

The missing mother figure poses a problem for Fatima and her sisters. At a universal level, the mother is central to the development of the child’s identity. Even more so, in Bedouin culture, mothers and daughters are extremely close. Lila Abu-Lughod’s *Veiled Sentiments* deals with a community of Bedouins in the Egyptian desert. Abu-Lughod explains:

Mothers and daughters are close and interdependent, spending a great deal of time together. Mothers rely on their daughters for help with work, for companionship, and, later in life, for care, and most relationships between mother and daughter are emotionally close (122).

Al-Tahawy creates a tent, a family with a missing mother figure. Instead of depending on a nurturing, safe environment provided by the mother, the girls live under tense conditions. Given that the mother figure typically represents the maternal and a nurturing environment, Grandmother Hakima is seen as a demon, a patronizing figure, yet she remains the mother of all.

How does this fit within gender relations and maternal relationships? Grandmother Hakima acts in place of the missing mother, the abjected madwoman, the girls' mother. She claims the private domain as her own, functions as the mother of the Shaikh as well as the girls' mother. Most importantly, Grandmother Hakima's relationship with her son is portrayed as one of both control and love: "She carried on in the same disapproving tone that was vicious for no reason: 'My God you're a wretched bunch! God has sorely tried your father and he's been patient.' She looked at him, but he didn't seem to care" (9). In this passage, Grandmother Hakima resents the girls, calling them wretched, as she only cares for and sympathizes with her son. The relationship between them is exemplified at numerous instances in the narrative. For example, upon the father's return, Grandmother Hakima informs him that there are marriage proposals for the eldest daughters. His response is very atypical of a Bedouin man: "They're still young" (34). Again, Al-Tahawy substitutes the typical masculine reaction with Grandmother Hakima's. Her reaction and attitude is very oppressive and even tyrannical:

"Bury them, before they bury your reputation and your fine qualities."

"Safiya?"

"And Fouz, the boy and his father."

"Did you answer their question?"

"Does such a question have an answer? Bind them in chains and throw them into a kind man's house. By God, a house with all these calamities in it is an evil omen. Put the dusty bird to flight and then God will give you a son to succeed you, my son" (34).

Grandmother Hakima is only able to see her son as a semi-God. He has "fine qualities" and his daughters are nothing more than a burden, although he never complains. Grandmother Hakima symbolizes the voice of internalized patriarchy. This is perhaps the worst type of patriarchy, the

success of patriarchy at turning women against each other, against one's self. Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa* clearly addresses this issue: "Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves...they have constructed the infamous logic of antilove" (2041-2). Al-Tahawy creates Grandmother Hakima's character to demonstrate the way that patriarchy has been deeply written on women's bodies and ideologically interpellated and implanted into their minds. As Cixous states, there is a violent hatred of women towards each other and it is deeply internalized. Rather than provide a nurturing and motherly environment for her granddaughters, Grandmother Hakima rejects them and rejects her own femininity. Kristeva suggests the following: "Fear of the uncontrollable generative mother repels me from the body...abjection (of the mother) leads me toward respect for the body of the other, my fellow man, my brother" (*Powers of Horror* 78-9). Because women are associated with the maternal, and by extension, the "uncontrollable" and the emotional, it is this fear that causes Grandmother Hakima to abject and reject everything feminine and her status as a woman. Grandmother Hakima voices the words of a patriarchal society, repeating them as though they are the only words that she knows and uses to sustain the gender hierarchies. According to Abu-Lughod, Bedouin ideology places men as superior to women, however, "women's submission is personally demeaning and worthless to their superiors *unless perceived as freely given*...people pity a woman who seems to obey her husband because she has no choice...those who are coerced into obeying are scorned, but those who voluntarily defer are honourable" (105, *my italics*). This explanation further emphasizes the complexities of Bedouin ideologies and the power relations at work; it is not a simple question of gender hierarchies. Women may in fact retain their status as honourable and worthy, especially if they do develop a

voice of their own, regardless of whether they actually have the autonomy to do so. In a sense, the actual performance matters, the utterances that the woman speaks. Rather than have anyone speak for her, on behalf of her, shun her, reject her, Grandmother Hakima speaks the language of the oppressor, further perpetuating the myth of womanhood and femininity that has been indoctrinated within her. She voluntarily and willingly oppresses other women whilst bowing her head to patriarchal values. In this way, she is able to develop a proud, honourable identity, regardless of the fractured sense of self she possesses. For example, it is Grandmother Hakima who arranges for Safiya and Fouz's marriage and forces them to obey her orders:

Grandmother offered them one of her sermons: 'By God, they bring nothing but bad luck! It's a waste to look after them. They're like a piece of merchandise you get ready for someone else...May God protect us from the evil they cause! I haven't had one daughter who's lived. People used to ask me: Hakima, where do all your daughters go? And I would say: I pray all the time and God is protecting me from their evil (60).

The narrator identifies her grandmother's speech as a sermon that is constantly repeating the same patriarchal ideology. Grandmother Hakima uses religion and patriarchy to legitimate oppression. Also, the reader is exposed to the daunting realization that Grandmother Hakima had daughters of her own, yet somehow, they have all passed away. At the wedding, a nameless character asks her: "But all of them dying like that, is it really just God's will or...?" (60) The question itself raises multiple doubts, especially with the emphasis on the ellipsis, as the questioner's voice drifts away, taking us with her on a journey of suspicions: what had really happened to all of Grandmother Hakima's daughters? Is there an "or?" She responds immediately with "God's will, my girl" (60). At this point, we begin to question the authenticity of Grandmother Hakima's words, and even more so, her mental stability. It remains unclear

whether she had played a role in discarding of her daughters, and this mystery remains unresolved.

Grandmother Hakima continually verbally harasses her granddaughters. She patronizes and demeans them in every possible way, whilst upholding her son's qualities, and obsessing over the importance of sons and boys in a family. This is not uncommon for a Bedouin culture that needs men and boys for its continuation in a very harsh environment, an environment plagued by tribal wars and the need for procreation. A tribe's political strength is shaped by the number of men in its tribe and the number of warriors. Abu-Lughod's explains: "One of the ways Bedouins express the value of males over females is their avowed preference for sons...people greet the birth of a boy with more enthusiasm than that of a girl" (120-21). However, Grandmother Hakima's preoccupation with sons is two-fold. She wants her son, the Sheikh of the tribe, to have a male heir. Secondly, her relationship with her son is symbiotic. In order to validate her own existence, she must ensure that her son is still in need of her, and that her position as an authority figure is not hindered. de Beauvoir explains the state of the mother in *The Second Sex*:

The mother demands that the projects of the child-god be conformable to her own ideals and that his success in them be assured...she needs to continue her beneficent activity in order to occupy her days; she wants to feel that she is indispensable to her god...his wife is going to deprive her of her functions. The hostility she feels towards this strange woman who 'takes away' her child has often been described (598-99).

de Beauvoir deals with a specific situation, in a Western context. The mother figure is unable to release her son, she is unable to let go, and becomes hostile towards the new woman in her son's life. Grandmother Hakima's hatred for Fatima's mother and her granddaughters stems from

multiple reasons, but amongst them, is her unwillingness to accept the loss of her son, and her position within the hierarchy is largely the result of oppressing other women. As such, Grandmother Hakima is constantly criticizing and verbally harassing Fatima's mad mother. Grandmother Hakima is the matriarch of the household; she plays a huge role in perpetuating oppression and the oppressive cycle. In other words, the oppressed (women) are actually involved in the cycle of oppressing the oppressed. We also see this in Roy's *The God of Small Things*, when Baby Kochamma and Mammachi are the ones who help Chacko confine Ammu to her room. Fatima's grandmother allows no room for freedom, no room for understanding and listening to the women in the tent, who are in actuality, under her supervision. She refers to the girls as "miserable creatures" and their mother as "deranged" (9).

In Al-Tahawy's *The Tent*, it is apparent that Grandmother Hakima carries the rules of the patriarchal culture and transmits them, applies them, uses them to oppress her own kind, simultaneously rejecting herself. Also, the survival of the tribe in a Bedouin culture is of the utmost importance; individuality comes second. In "Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan" Gloria Anzaldúa relates her own experience growing up along the borders of US and Mexico. There is a striking similarity between Anzaldúa's perception of her own culture and a Bedouin, tribal culture. Individuality is erased, the self comes last, and the well-being of the tribe and community is highly valued. Anzaldúa's descriptions relate to a Bedouin culture as the similarities are evident. For example, Anzaldúa states: "Culture forms our beliefs... Culture is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. How many times have I heard mothers and mother-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them" (1018). Grandmother Hakima allies herself with the community, with the well-being of the patriarchal tribe, and rejects herself as an individual and the rest of the women in the

tent. Grandmother Hakima, like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma in Roy's *The God of Small Things*, is an agent of patriarchy. Her granddaughters are the enemy, and she makes sure that they know it. Fatima's eldest sister, Safiya, suffers from her grandmother's condemnation of their mother. At night, while she is asleep, she voices her anger: "You're the one who's deranged. Wicked old crow! Four girls and three boys. What can she do? What can she do against the will of God and your poisonous eyes?" (10). Safiya retaliates only in her sleep, defending her mother and the miscarriages that she keeps having. None of the girls are able to speak in front of their grandmother. Even when they sing, they are silenced. Grandmother Hakima labels them as "sluts" for singing, and as a result, they stop singing, afraid of her criticism and anger (35-6). Fatima narrates: "Even if she couldn't hear me she was going to break my neck one day. Her vicious gold teeth followed me in my dreams and filled me with terror" (10). She is in control of every aspect of their lives, the father figure remains absent, silenced, appearing occasionally only to agree to her demands.

The Mad Mother, Loss, and Mourning

The madwoman in the tent, Fatima's mother, is referred to as "deranged" and the reader never hears her speak. She is not given a voice. Everything we hear about her is uttered either through the Grandmother's condemnation of her, or through the narrator (Fatima's) perception of her. Perhaps the most significant theme interlocked with the madwoman's plight in this chapter is the burden of motherhood and the pressures of adhering to society's expectations. Because she is seen as deviant, she is placed in a room on her own. Anzaldúa reminds us: "Deviance is whatever is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants" (1019). Fatima's mother is condemned for not giving birth to sons, for having numerous miscarriages, for being "cursed" and "deranged." Grandmother Hakima utters the verdict: "That woman's

brought nothing but disaster since the day she came. Every time God gives her a boy, he gets taken away. And she's deranged. I fear for my soul when I see her having those fits. It's an evil omen" (63). Since Fatima's mother's main crime is associated with her body, largely the fault of her miscarriages, and the pressure of conceiving and giving birth to boys, then it is safe to postulate that it is the culture that drives her mad. Being the wife of the Sheikh, she is expected to conform, to behave in a certain manner, and provide male heirs. Her mother-in-law is a tyrannical figure, constantly badgering and inflicting wounds on all the women in the tent. There is no escape. The following excerpt provides insight into the madwoman's state, as Fatima narrates the events to her eldest sister, Safiya:

I muttered, 'She was screaming, and staggering about. Then she fell over. They wiped blood from between her legs.'

Safiya was greatly distressed and said, 'She lost the baby?'

'I don't know. She never stops screaming. Sardoub's taken her to the lemon room' (65).

The narrator explains, through a series of confused articulations, what she perceives. The madwoman has been taken to a lemon/yellow room, which, in a sense, is reminiscent of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" in which the main character is placed in a room with yellow wallpaper in order to heal from her supposed bouts of madness. Interestingly, Gilman's text is a popular Western one, and yet there is a connection between the yellow room and Al-Tahawy's lemon/yellow room. The allusion that Al-Tahawy draws is especially significant for this project's claim that everywhere there are connections, the mad western woman is not too different from her Eastern counterpart. Mad female protagonists share commonalities in different works of fiction, despite cultural and geographical differences. Fatima's mother's body suffers constantly; there is blood at all instances where she does see her.

Blood is a symbol for defilement, coming face to face with the abject. Kristeva also speaks of defilement in *Powers of Horror* and explains that is not “lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Fatima’s mother’s presence in the tent is disturbing, she is the abject, and the blood Fatima witnesses symbolizes decay and death; everything that is improper. Fatima does not understand what she has witnessed, but it is the body of the mother that creates an inner dilemma for her –what she has seen cannot be defined. Upon viewing the abject, upon coming face to face with the image of her mother in blood, Fatima slips into the realm of madness, disengaging herself from her surroundings and her physical environment. Kristeva explains:

How can I be without border? That elsewhere that I imagine beyond the present, or that I hallucinate so that I might, in a present time, speak to you, conceive of you –it is now here, jetted, abjected, into ‘my’ world. Deprived of world, therefore, *I fall in a faint*...The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life (4).

The subject is unable to negotiate a space between the self/other, the self and that which is abjected; the borders are diminished. The protagonist must make amends with the “corpse” or the decaying body of the mother, but she is unable to do so, and thus, begins spiralling downwards into the realm of madness, loss, and melancholia, which I shall refer to later on in this chapter. In *Unsettling the Bildungsroman*, Bolaki finds in the female *Bildungsroman* a sort of “melancholic agency located in the protagonist’s passionate but traumatic relationship with her mother” (28). Al-Tahawy centres Fatima’s internal conflict on this very passionate, yet distressing and unsettling relationship with the mother figure.

Fatima's mother, the first madwoman, is subjugated first and foremost as a body, as merely a womb. In "Disciplinary Mothers: Feminism and the New Reproductive Technologies," Jana Sawicki explains the correlation between the female body, the mother's, and Western society's regulation of the body. First, she discusses disciplinary practices:

Disciplinary practices represent the body as a machine. They aim to render the individual both more powerful, productive, useful and docile. They are located within institutions as hospitals, schools, and prisons...but also at the microlevel of society in everyday activities and habits of individuals (190).

In Al-Tahawy's text, the tent is a place where disciplinary practices are very much intact. Female bodies are controlled and regulated, made useful, and are found to be useless is lacking in any way. The female characters in the text are aware of their use-value and are reminded of this by the matriarch who repeats the words of patriarchy and aims to protect the tribe, the collective, rather than the individual. Sawicki speaks of motherhood: "As an identity, an ideology, and an institution, motherhood has been both a source of power and enslavement for women" (197). This holds true especially in a Bedouin society, where motherhood is equivalent to use-value, and the birth of sons is regarded very highly. Sawicki examines the way motherhood has been constructed and posited:

Mothers whose bodies are not fit for pregnancy (either biologically or socially), mothers who are psychologically unfit for fertility treatments, mothers whose wombs are hostile environments for their fetuses...as these medical disciplines isolate specific types of abnormalcy or deviancy, they construct new norms of healthy and responsible motherhood (194).

Although Sawicki provides an argument that is very apt for Western society, in the case of Bedouin culture, there were no medical disciplines regulating and prescribing what was deemed as healthy motherhood. On the contrary, it was the patriarchal culture that both prescribed and described motherhood and womanhood. Abu-Lughod explains in *Veiled Sentiments*:

For instance, as reproducers, women are responsible for giving birth to the children that are so desired and adored. Everyone wants children, and men want as many as they can have and support...if they (women) have trouble conceiving or carrying pregnancies to term, they turn to ritual specialists, folk healers, or doctors for help. Fertile women are valued, admired, and envied (123).

In *The Tent*, the only treatment available for the madwoman is to keep her confined in a room, and hope that she will not have yet another miscarriage. Her physical limitations are seen as derangement, and the pressure of motherhood, specifically giving birth to sons, adds to her self-annihilation and alleged madness. Jane Ussher explains in *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness* the way Western society disciplined women: "As female psychology was linked with reproduction, any woman deviating from the prescribed role of good wife and mother was liable to be treated by one of the available 'cures' (89).

Similarly to Western society, Bedouin culture applies the same cure to women who deviate from the norm: confinement. It comes as no surprise then, that the madwoman in *The Tent* is a mother who "fails" to function as expected. Each time she is pregnant, the baby is a boy which she miscarries. This is not arbitrary and we can postulate that her womb rejects boys as a form of resistance. In itself, her madness is subversive, challenging the role of motherhood and femininity, as the tribe is unsure what to do with her. The madwoman's death is narrated by the protagonist:

Sweat was pouring from my mother's face...we heard his footsteps approaching and the crying stopped. He came in and Sardoub shooed us away from the bed. Mother looked at him through half-open eyes and dripping sweat...I hardly dared to breathe. Was she dead...A great silence settled over the house...The mourning lasted for three days (67-8).

Mourning enters the tent, as the ritual in Arab/Muslim culture is to mourn for three days. The loss of the mother affects Fatima's sense of self and further instigates her descent into madness. While she is sleeping, Fatima hurts her eye, and relates imaginary characters and events to Sardoub, the family's slave. Fatima becomes frustrated: "Why wouldn't she believe me? The genie told me it was the key of life, and I saw it with my own eyes, a pharanoic symbol" (70). Fatima's mourning begins as the mourning of the loss of her mother and ends in melancholia towards the end of the text. Sigmund Freud distinguishes the two states of being in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*:

Mourning is commonly the reaction to loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, and ideal or so on. In some people, whom we for this reason suspect of having a pathological disposition, melancholia appears in place of mourning...Melancholia is mentally characterized by a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world...we have a better understanding of this when we bear in mind that mourning displays the same traits, apart from one: the disorder of self-esteem is absent (203-4).

Fatima mourns her loss in her own way, by escaping reality, creating an alter life in her mind where there are numerous characters she engages with, specifically Zahwa the genie who she imagines having conversations with. Safiya, the eldest sister, mourns the mother's loss differently. We are told that: "Her tongue was becoming more insolent in its responses" (71).

She becomes more resistant to Grandmother Hakima's oppressive attitude. She is able to voice her anger, while Fatima relates that her "hair grew longer. Every day it grew and grew to the sound of my screams" (71). Fatima begins rejecting herself, her body, and her hair, which is yet another form of oppression to her, as it is always being combed, untangled and unknotted (71). Her initial mourning becomes pathological melancholia. Fatima's melancholia is linked to a pathological state, the loss of the ego, and a disregard for the self. She rejects her body as well as her mind.

Madness, Disability, Shame and *Asil*

The narrator faces even more marginalization and rejection when her body no longer functions as expected. The first instance of marginalization occurs when Fatima breaks her leg. Fatima continuously engages in dangerous activities, specifically climbing trees: "I climbed the trees whenever my father was away or had gone to hunt. Through the branches I could see the front of the house, the buildings across the road, the camels resting, and guest house... Finally I had found something to do" (15). She is able to gain access to the outside world through climbing the trees – this gives her a sense of freedom and independence outside the walls of the tent. Once she breaks her leg, her physical ability to move is greatly hindered: "I crawled from room to room, and the wooden floorboards left marks on my legs" (31). Grandmother Hakima labels her a "damned nuisance, climbing up the walls till she cripples herself... only one leg. By God, I'd break your other leg if it would teach you some shame" (32). The choice of words signifies the importance of being functional as a person, as a body, and anything else is disavowed, considered a form of madness. In such a society, the physically disabled, as well as the mad, are considered less functional, shameful, occupy shameful bodies as well as shame the individual and the collective. Grandmother Hakima also links Fatima's actions not only to

madness, but more importantly, to a lack of shame. Abu-Lughod deals with the concept of shame and wisdom/sanity in a Bedouin context in *Veiled Sentiments*:

Hasham is closely tied to the concept of 'agl, the social sense and self-control of honourable persons...Children, who are said not to have much 'agl, must be taught to *tahashsham* (v.); the primary goal of socialization is to teach them to understand social contexts and to act appropriately within them...Mothers often scold their children with the imperative, which can be translated as 'behave yourself' or 'act right' and which implies, 'have some shame'...The notions of *hasham* and 'agl are closely wedded in notions of the ideal woman (108).

Grandmother Hakima utters the very same notions that Abu-Lughod describes as part of Bedouin ideology and cultural values and expectations. Fatima, like her mother, lacks mental stability or 'agl and refuses to abide by the rules of *hasham* and does not recognize shame until much later in the text. Fatima only recognizes shame once it manifests on her body, in the form of disability, and she recognizes that she has been marginalized, othered, disavowed. However, at first, breaking her leg only limits her physically and does not affect her mentally or emotionally. This is partly due to her father's reaffirmation of her sense of self. When she first breaks her leg, he does not shun her, nor does he consider her a lesser being. On the contrary, he reminds her of her nobleness, or *asl* (*asl* is a noun, while *asil* is an adjective). Abu-Lughod explains the concept of purity and nobility: "Blood both links people to the past and binds them in the present. As a link to the past, through genealogy, blood is essential to the definition of cultural identity. Nobility of origin or ancestry (*asl*) is the point of great concern" (41). The basis of Bedouin identity is a solid link to blood lines, to purity rather than hybridity or being of a mixed breed: "Blood is the authenticator of origin or pedigree and as such is critical to Bedouin identity...nobility of origin

is believed to confer moral qualities and character” (45). As such, Fatima’s noble origins are the basis of her identity and provide her with a sense of worthiness. Bloodline is extremely important both for the nobility and purity of a family, as well as for horses. In *Noble Brutes*, Donna Landry explains Eastern ideologies concerning purebred horses and how these ideologies were so intrinsic to Eastern culture:

What seems uncontested, nevertheless, is that a potent infusion of Eastern blood transformed not only the equine gene pool in the British Isles but also ideas about horse breeding...Ironically, those keen genealogists, English horse breeders, first learned about equine pedigree keeping in the East. They imported the idea of a purified lineage and of written documentation to support it along with the horses themselves (76).

The very nature of purity of bloodlines and *asl* is inextricably linked to Eastern and Bedouin culture and their management of their horses. The emphasis placed on Eastern horses’ nobility is synonymous with Bedouin *asl*. At the same time, such nobility of heritage carried certain burdening expectations. Landry adds: “Once Eastern bloodstock became better known in Britain, these characteristics of intelligent loyalty and willingness to serve, apprehended as purity of lineage, became part of popular discourse about those superior equines, horses of ‘quality’” (137).

Given that Eastern horses carried such significant qualities, they were also expected to behave in a certain manner, similarly to Bedouin women. The following passage exemplifies this very specific, yet very constraining identity, expressed by Fatima’s father:

He patted me on the cheek. ‘Fatima my dear, you wouldn’t annoy your grandmother, would you? Fatim is a princess...And if the King of Egypt himself came to ask for your

hand in marriage, I'd chase him away like a dog. Fatim comes from a long line of noble folk...She's a pure Adnanian filly...isn't that right, my little princess?'

I touched his face. 'I'll stay with you. I won't marry anyone else.' (32-3).

Fatima's father expresses Bedouin ideology clearly, linking his daughter's identity to his own noble heritage. He places great value on her worth, which can be very constraining and poses many intricate issues of use-value and exchange-value. She is rendered an object, specifically a "filly" to be either kept or sold. Bedouins tend to associate women with their reproductive abilities and fertility, placing great value on those abilities specific to female anatomy and sexuality. Simultaneously, this value may be a double-edged sword, rendering women invisible, depriving them of any other function, equating them with horses that are meant to be kept, controlled, and made use of. Just as the horse's bloodline is examined, and it is crucial for its value to be established, women's value is derived from their linkage to purity and noble *asl* lines. Abu-Lughod explains: "It is the association with nature that is special to females, the source of both their positive and negative value. Bedouins do not devalue all that is natural and related to reproduction" (125).

There is both power and powerlessness within the framework which restricts women to an identity closely equated to pure horses or fillies. Horses are necessary for the survival of the Bedouin, in all aspects. Horses represent and signify a solid commitment, a life-long friendship that is established between the owner and the horse; an unspoken agreement is maintained throughout the relationship. The horse functions also as a representative of the owner, mirroring the owner's actions, identity, and moral superiority. We can also postulate that the mare or the filly carries more of the burden, more value, being closely associated with female space and the feminine. The mare is tied to the maternal, to the ability to procreate and add more not only to

the individual, but also to the collective, to the tribe's power and status in relation to other tribes. This resonates clearly with the reproductive value placed on women.

Fatima's father offers her an identity, security, and she responds with an unwavering loyalty – she will not “marry” anyone else. This statement demonstrates the extent of the relationship between Fatima and her father, her desire to please him, and her inability to separate from the father figure in her life, the only male figure she associates with. This confusion accumulates and adds to her inability to develop a stable sense of self. To add to the physiological trauma, a psychological trauma occurs when Fatima witnesses her father exiting her mother's room, and she is informed that he strangles her mother:

I tried to crawl away, but my leg was buried in bandages, and however far I crawled the sound of her sobbing followed me.

‘He strangles, her,’ Sasa told me. She has seen him strangle her before...at first I didn't believe Sasa, however much she insisted it was true...I loved his silence...but her sobbing frightened me more and I wondered why he strangled her (38-9).

The realization that her father is not as idealized as she would have him be affects Fatima deeply. She begins to detach herself from her father and everyone around her, except for her horse, Khayra. Khayra is a “pure Arabian filly” just like Fatima, a princess, and she is a part of Fatima's identity. Khayra, whose name literally translates into “goodness” is Fatima's stronger self, her noble self, her purity is untainted and remains strongly embedded in Khayra. The other part of Fatima is Zahwa, her gazelle. Zahwa is the character that Fatima speaks to constantly in her imagination, creating a parallel, imaginative world, where Zahwa speaks and listens to her. Zahwa, Fatima's gazelle, is a gift from her father. Later, she is slaughtered mercilessly by the servants, as her Grandmother Hakima orders (52). After Zahwa's death, she continues to live in

Fatima's mind, while Khayra, her horse, becomes an object of interest to the coloniser, Anne. Anne's fictional character is reminiscent of Lady Anne Blunt. Lady Anne Blunt was fascinated with the horses of Arabia. For instance, one apt example would be her reaction upon being acquainted with Prince Hamud's mares in Hail, Saudi Arabia. Lady Anne Blunt had confessed: "If I could have my choice I would take Hamud's mare. Next the brown, third the chestnut" (Winstone 159). Lady Anne Blunt and her husband, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, were both very preoccupied with understanding the Bedouins and their mares. In *Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates*, Lady Anne Blunt writes of their experience in the Bedouin desert and relays a conversation they had with a Bedouin man, Smeyr, who discusses mares and *asil* with them:

Wilfrid then inquired about the horses or rather mares in Jebel Shammar... "Just the same," he [Smeyr] answered... "There are good horses in Nejd and *asil* (thoroughbred), but the Anazeh horses are the best"... He took us to look at this mare, which was standing just outside. She is a chestnut with three white legs... On the whole, we are pleasantly impressed with Smeyr (277-78).

Lady Anne Blunt's book explores the Bedouin tribes' understanding and love for their mares, their preoccupation with *asil* horses and mares, and the importance of preserving *asl*. Arabia's royal mares were not for sale and not up for negotiation. Lady Anne Blunt soon became aware of the infinite love and pride the Bedouins possessed regarding their mares and *asl*. Yet in *The Tent*, Al-Tahawy portrays the character Anne as someone who is able to take forcefully Khayra away, breed from her, and affects Fatima's well-being in more ways than one. For Al-Tahawy, this twentieth century Anne, unlike Lady Anne Blunt, can have only a poisonous and exploitative relationship with the Bedouins.

The Coloniser (Anne) and Fatima

Fatima's relationship with Anne is extremely problematic and is one of the main factors that leads to her madness and physical disability. Upon first meeting Khayra, Anne is obsessed with the idea of buying Khayra and breeding from her. Anne tries to buy Khayra, but both Fatima and her father refuse to hand over such a noble filly. Fatima's father explains that since Fatima is of noble origins, she has the right to keep or sell her filly. This ideology is reminiscent of my initial comparison between Fatima and Khayra – for they are one and the same, at least metonymically. When the coloniser first enters the picture, she is mesmerized by Khayra and wishes to purchase her. Although Fatima is very young, she is able to discern the following about Anne: "I don't think she could understand anything beyond wanting to possess some pure Arabian breeding stock...and I stared at her more defiantly and more stubbornly, 'Khayra is my filly'" (45). The first description of Anne is very significant to her characterization and the way by which Al-Tahawy wants her readers to perceive her:

The more I scrutinized Anne's face the more I realized that she was not beautiful, despite her white skin and her blue eyes...her blue eyes showed neither brightness nor life. There was only one expression, and it was similar to that of a spider crouching silently in wait of its prey. She had set her heart on Khayra from the beginning...she would follow me with her eyes...and I would run away looking desperately for Zahwa. But Zahwa had left me. And then there was Khayra, her breeding, and her training, and the races. Last but not least there was my education, so that I would be fit to bear the title 'princess' (46).

Anne's obsession with possessing Khayra goes hand in hand with educating Fatima. Both Fatima and her double, Khayra, must undergo a process of objectification and molding. Both are under Anne's commands and are the object of her fascination and analysis. Through attempting to

understand both Bedouin culture and breed Khayra, Anne's character symbolizes colonialism and imperialism, as well as the discourse of power and knowledge.

The Orient for the coloniser in *The Tent* is a plethora of symbols, subjects/objects: Bedouin culture, Fatima, and Khayra. All three are to be penetrated, objectified, and reduced to a form of knowledge. Fatima's body is fascinating to Anne, upon first seeing her bathe: "She seemed surprised, as if she had discovered the existence of something special in me. It was the same way she had reacted to Khayra's mane...she began to apply the moist ointment that always made my wound turn into a mass of burning flame" (48). Anne attempts to help heal Fatima's wounded leg, but in the process adds to her injury. Anne is also fascinated with Fatima's long hair: "my plaits fascinated her. She would undo them and comb them into a 'ponytail'" (49). The term ponytail is entirely foreign to her and is yet another invasion of her privacy and her body.

Fatima's psychological turmoil is heightened when her father takes another wife, Dawwaba. She is "heartbroken" and breaks her leg for the second time (80). She is referred to as the "demented cripple" and constantly crawls around, finding refuge only in sleep. Her choice of room is, not surprisingly, the very same lemon room that her mother had resided in –the arena of insanity. Dawwaba refers to Fatima as "mentally unhinged....bad omen" which further outcasts her. Her father stops speaking to her, uncomfortable with her presence and her disabled body, and sends her to Anne's house for the second time. This time, Khayra refuses to eat, mirroring her owner's emotional and physical deteriorating state. Anne takes both Khayra and Fatima to her mansion, where Khayra becomes pregnant and Fatima loses her leg. She wakes up one day to discover that Anne had amputated her leg in order to save her from further infections, but all she comprehends is that she is "really 'the cripple' and there was nothing I could do to avoid the name" (96). Her body is invaded, her leg is amputated by Anne, without her permission, and she

is left to negotiate her presence in the world through a disabled body and a psychologically unstable mind. Toril Moi explains in *Sex, Gender and the Body*:

Perceived as part of lived experience, the body is a style of being, an intonation, a specific way of being present in the world, but it does not for that reason cease to be an object with its own specific physical properties...the body is our perspective on the world, and at the same time that body is engaged in a dialectical interaction with its surroundings, that it so say with all the other situations in which the body is placed...The body is a historical sedimentation of our way of living in the world, and of the world's living with us (68)

Fatima's body engages with its surroundings: patriarchal and colonial oppression and subjugation, confining her either to a tent or to a huge mansion, always rendering her invisible and hidden in the private sphere. As Elizabeth Grosz offered in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*:

The body is commonly considered a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private (ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, affects)...it is through the body that the subject can express his or her interiority, and it is through the body that he or she can receive, code, and translate the inputs of the 'external' world (9).

As such, Fatima's body and her disability mirror her inner state of helplessness, vulnerability and powerlessness in the face of oppression. Al-Tahawy's plot is structured in such a way as to reveal the coloniser as the one who amputates Fatima's leg, adding to her disability, this time officially disabling her. If she had had a broken leg before, now she is left with no leg at all. The

coloniser's attempt at saving Fatima has proven to be futile and even more destructive than her original state of being.

Anne's obsession with Fatima's horse reflects the Orientalist's obsession with the Eastern other. For Anne, Fatima is part of the package of Khayra. Fatima will not give up Khayra, and as a result, Anne must employ different tools in order to coax Fatima to allow her to breed from Khayra. Being a female Orientalist and occupying a place and space of power in the Orient is a position that must be considered carefully. Anne, unlike her Western male Orientalist counterpart, is a woman, considered the lesser binary in the binary of man/woman; however, she is also the dominant self in the binary of Western woman/Eastern other/woman. Anne maintains a strong and powerful position in Bedouin culture and even the Shaikh himself holds respect for her, allowing her to take and educate his beloved daughter. In *Colonial Fantasies* Yeğenoğlu considers a female Orientalist's narrative, that of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She explains the sexual discourse behind the Western woman's fascination with the Orient and the position she occupies: "As a woman, Montagu (in the West), has been denied access to return to, to go back to her origin/mother/womb so as to be able to produce and re-produce herself... She is not capable of founding her own truth, identity/self *in the West*" (Yeğenoğlu 93). I would argue that Anne is yet another Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, another example of the female Orientalist whose discourse "repeats and reproduces all the existing tropes and concerns that characterize the Orientalist/phallogocentric discourses... she is both a supplement and an origin, an extra that fills out the void and a plentitude simultaneously. But this does not prevent her performing Orientalism's epistemic violence" (93-4). Al-Tahawy's text is filled with a network of women and their coexistence and interactions – as such, it is not altogether surprising that the

coloniser/Orientalist is also a woman. Al-Tahawy aims to elucidate the multidimensional power relations at work between women.

Fatima must face patriarchy, colonialism, matriarchy, and a female Orientalist who continues to observe her and tries to educate and mould her. She relays: “But when her guests came round in the evenings, and their glasses were filled and the conversation flowed, Anne would dress me up in one of the cloaks that Mouha had embroidered with bright colors...she loved my stories and nothing delighted her more” (97). Not only does Anne enjoy the access she has into the Bedouin female space, but she also invites other foreigners to listen to what Fatima has to tell, and she would ask Fatima to sing: “They would gaze at me with curious eyes and I would sing” (98). Al-Tahawy makes her attack upon the Orientalist very clear. The rest of the foreigners, Orientalists, and researchers are proud of Anne’s accomplishments:

They smiled in astonishment and heaped praise upon her. She told them about her research, in which she was recording her observations of Bedouin life. She listed her interests, horses, hawks, hunting, woman. She went on about it at length, and they questioned her with great interest. I withdrew inside myself...I felt that my existence was like that of the birds in their cages and Khayra in her stall (99).

The above passage exemplifies the relationship between coloniser/colonised and the Orientalist’s perception of the Orient, always to be analysed, studied, and written for and about. In *Colonial Fantasies* Meyda Yeğenoğlu proposes:

We need to keep in mind that the imperialist gesture of subject constitution is always predicated upon the recognition of the other through assimilation, through the logic of the same. Such a process of assimilation necessarily entails a translation and we should not forget that every act of translation is an act of transformation of the radical alterity into

the self's own terms...within the apparatus of colonial power difference is always understood through the logic of the same, through the self, and as such is nothing but an inverted mirror-image of the same (84-5).

Therefore, Anne uses Fatima as an object, to be assimilated and molded into the very same image Anne has of herself and of what a Bedouin girl embodies. Her disability and her Bedouin identity are made into a freak show. This is reminiscent of Rosemarie Garland Thomson's view on how disabled and different bodies have been forced to perform for society:

The freak show is a spectacle, a cultural performance that gives primacy to visual apprehension in creating symbolic codes and institutionalizes the relationship between the spectacle and the spectators. In freak shows, the exhibited body became a text written in boldface to be deciphered according to the needs and desires of the onlookers (60).

Fatima's performance is both of a racially and physically othered female. Her disability and her Bedouin identity is used and abused for the Western onlookers. Her only escape is insanity, outside of the realms of reality. She is able to discern that she is equated with animals and her beloved Khayra. There is no room for her "true" self and her own established identity. Fatima is only able to respond to the pressures and subjugation she endures inside her head. Only in her head does she speak, only in her head does she scream at Anne:

I'd had enough...I was sick of it. I am not a frog in a crystal jar for you to gaze upon. I am Fatim, ya-Anee, flesh and blood...I'm not going to sing. I'm not going to perform Bedouin folk songs. And I don't want to jabber away in any language. All I will do is wail like the ravens of doom...Khayra grew weary from all the young she bore...Every year she would produce a new breed. Are you fed up, Khayra, like me? Books and writing paper, pregnancy and labour (107-8).

Fatima's split is evident. Like her beloved Khayra, she is fed up, she is exhausted, taken advantage of, used, abused, and silenced. All she will do is "wail like the ravens of doom" having reached a helpless, hopeless state mirrored by her leg amputation and her mental instability. Khayra's body, like Fatima, is weary, yet she maintains and sustains her one function as a reproductive force – but Fatima has lost even that quality.

Madwomen figures throughout this thesis have been able to speak and vocally criticise their environments and diagnose their own conditions. Bertha/Antoinette is able to speak against society, against Rochester, Catherine is able to speak against Edgar and diagnose herself, Ammu and Maha speak against the coloniser and patriarchy. All of these madwomen figures have the ability to articulate what is happening to them and critique their environments. Fatima thinks to herself, diagnosing her own condition: "Fatima had split in two, one half jabbering away in foreign languages and the other singing traditional Bedouin folk songs" (117). Fatima is able to discern what has happened to her identity. To help clarify the split that occurs within the self after being exposed to two languages and cultures, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o speaks of this dilemma in *The Language of African Literature*. For Ngugi, language is a carrier of culture and identity. Upon entering a colonial school, a certain "harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture" (265). Ngugi adds: "The language and literature was taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds" (266). For Ngugi, culture and language are inextricably linked: "Language carries culture, and culture carries...the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (267). In *The Tent* this very dilemma of self-perception is exemplified at numerous instances, especially when Fatima states: "What is Fatim doing with letters, with words, when

the loneliness is excoriating?” (115-6). Fatima’s loneliness and alienation from herself and her environment are a reaction to the patriarchal and colonial oppressions working against her.

Fatima as ‘Madwoman’

Because Fatima is now labelled as mad and physically disabled, she is rejected and expelled from her community. Unlike Maha and Um Saad in *Pillars of Salt*, Fatima is not placed in a mental asylum. Like Ammu in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, and Bertha/Antoinette in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Fatima is expelled and abjected from her community, left alone, and exiled. She is forced into exile –mentally, emotionally and physically. Edward Said’s “The Mind of Winter” is concerned with the condition of exile and the diasporic existence in a postcolonial context. He describes exile as, “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (439). Fatima is unable to find her true home, her comfort zone, her place of security and safety. Said also states: “For exile is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being” (440). Fatima’s mental and emotional state is precisely undergoing deterioration and disentanglement. She decides to move into her mother’s old room, the yellow room and narrates: “My heart was a lake of dried salt, shimmering in the distance, without waves or life. The walls of the room were full of cracks where the mud had split” (114). All around her there is “nothing but emptiness and silence, and the sad mutterings of the wind” (121). As such, her exilic position leaves her in a constant state of mental and physical deterioration. At the same time, because she occupies the place of the disavowed, an exilic state, outside the borders of what is deemed acceptable and normal, she is able at the very least to threaten the hegemonic order by her very existence, exposing everything that is culturally disavowed. By constructing a disabled and mad heroine, Al-Tahawy displaces the negative and oppressive cultural connotations of disability and lack. The shame that is so inextricably linked

to *Hasham* is transcended. Fatima's disabled body and madness marginalizes her, but simultaneously lends her power. She is racially and physically othered, yet it is this very otherness that places her in an ambiguous position of both power and powerlessness. Fatima recovers some power in her body, although it is defined a disabled body, a body that lacks and does not conform. Her agency is one of embodiment, grounded specifically in her experience of physical and mental alienation.

In Al-Tahawy's *The Tent*, Fatima's performance as a madwoman and a disabled woman disrupts order; she is the abject, the rejected body, and the transgressive subject that must be expelled. Her madness and disability are subversive and resistant. Her Grandmother fears her, Dawwaba fears her, and her father abandons her. Her body becomes a site for resistance as well as her mind; there is a dual play on the mind and the body's capacity for resistance. Not only does her body prove itself to be rebellious, different, and dangerous, but her mind also begins to assume a different method of rebellion altogether. She states: "I started to delight in the game of silence, and I wondered what would happen if I stopped speaking altogether" (118). Physically, she decides to throw away her crutch and "went back to crawling...I'll just crawl through the burning desert that scorches my leg as I drag it along" (120). As such, Fatima makes choices. She *chooses* to perform the role of the disabled woman, as well as the madwoman. She does not simply fall prey to disability and madness, she does not succumb to madness per se. Fatima plays a role; she is an active agent in her subversive performance. Fatima becomes a replica of her mother: "I had entered the chamber of sobbing silence. The same swollen eyes. Maybe that's why little girls were afraid of me...Maybe that's why my father had stopped coming" (124). The abandonment she faces when her father replaces her with his youngest, healthiest daughter, Samawwat, leaves her utterly broken. Again, she reprimands him silently, asking him questions

in her head: “Even your eyes no longer see me. Why have you abandoned your beloved?” (126). Her father needs physical support, as he has grown older, and Fatima is unable to provide him with that support, hence she is rendered helpless and not valuable. To add insult to injury, it is easier for him to turn away from Fatima, her disability, and her madness: “Whenever our eyes met as I crawled about, he turned his face away” (127). Although she is aware of her father’s (and society’s) discomfort with her presence as she crawls about, she does not attempt to rectify the situation or amend her image in any manner. Instead, she takes on her role and pushes it to the limit, to the very furthest extent, to the edge of the boundaries and borders as they threaten to dissolve her very existence within the community. For both madwomen in the text, for Fatima and her mother, there is a disassociation from the self and the body which is a turning point for disintegration, psychic and physical suffering. The mind and the body suffer together which leads to complete annihilation and exile. Unlike the works of the Brontës, Rhys, Roy, and Faqir, *The Tent* deals with a physically othered female protagonist, one that is both physically disabled and mad. Her physical disability renders her subhuman, shameful in a culture that demands normalcy. Not only is she mad, but she is also physically disabled; her supposed lack is twofold. However Fatima’s failure to conform to a ‘normal’ body and mental state leaves her in an ambiguous, ambivalent state of being. She is not altogether powerless, but she is not powerful either. Al-Tahawy’s *The Tent* exemplifies the role of the madwoman as an agent of subversion, her mind and body both potential sites for a breakthrough as well as breakdown.

Conclusion: Madwomen Agents of Resistance to Empire and Indigenous Patriarchy

One of the main objectives of this project has been to question the dichotomy that has continued to separate Western women from Eastern women. The texts I have analysed expose the falsity of this separationist thought. The fictional works all share similar patterns in terms of plot, whether Victorian, South Asian, Postcolonial, or Bedouin. The madwoman in the attic prototype has overshadowed other female experiences of madness. My selection of texts has been essentially based on a desire to include other madwomen into the literary canon and to shift the scene from the British attic to include a more diverse understanding of the ‘madwoman’ experience. The spatial entrapment is not limited to the attic, but rather includes rooms, asylums, tents – and that is not to exclude emotional and/or mental entrapment.

My thesis has investigated the commonalities found in literary works written by women in the Anglophone world about female experiences of madness. I have chosen texts from different cultures and time periods purposefully; nineteenth-century and late twentieth-century. I am aware that literary critics tend to characterize and categorize literary works according to time periods, schools, genres, and nations. This categorization ultimately relies on establishing differences between texts, authors, and cultures. When looking for differences within texts and experiences, first, one has to reduce similarities and exaggerate differences. This method eventually creates opposition between East and West. My thesis emphasizes the importance and prevalence of commonalities in literary works that trace the heroine’s *Bildungsroman* and madness. While the Victorian works explicitly tackle the *Bildungsroman* in terms of gender and patriarchy, there are racial politics at work, although less explicit. The Postcolonial and Bedouin fictions I have selected deal with the *Bildungsroman* primarily in terms of race and colonialism;

gender and patriarchy are also salient issues. In all four chapters, I have examined the female heroine's journey away from colonial and neocolonial race and gender oppression, a journey into the self, and outside and away from the self, too. Borders and boundaries – even between sanity/insanity – eventually collapse.

The re-reading of the Victorian texts is necessary to locate the experience of madness in relation to the British Empire and its ideologies, in order to show how the Victorian patriarchal and racist culture fostered native women's social and mental alienation. I have focused on Catherine Earnshaw's bout of madness and subsequent death in *Wuthering Heights*, reading her mental and bodily experience of annihilation as a form of protest. Catherine chooses to write her own ending, fleeing from the sexual and class and racial oppression she and Heathcliff have endured. She tells Nelly that the oppression Heathcliff has always faced is a pain that she also carries: "My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning" (82). Catherine is as oppressed as a racial other. His suffering is synonymous to hers; race and gender are intertwined and both affect one's place on the social hierarchy. All of the heroines discussed in this study are eventually exiled and excluded from society. For example, Catherine is ostracized even after her death:

The place of Catherine's interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel, under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations...It was dug on a green slope in a corner...where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat mould almost buries it" (171).

Although she was not confined to an attic, like Bertha/Antoinette (*Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*) or to an asylum like Maha and Um Saad (*Pillars of Salt*), her grave embodies a confinement

and occupies very little space. This form of physical exclusion even in death is also seen in Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Ammu suffers from the same fate: "The church refused to bury Ammu. On several counts. So Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the electric crematorium" (Roy 154). Ammu and Catherine are both punished for their choice of lovers, Heathcliff and Velutha, both of whom are outcasts and Untouchables. Their love affairs are a form of protest, a subversion of the status quo; Catherine and Ammu are both able to identify with the other, a male counterpart who suffers from race/caste and social stigma. I have also traced Victorian sexism and racism in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. My argument has been keen on unveiling the relationship between Jane's fate and Bertha's. Jane, like Catherine, is born a woman and that is her misfortune, while Bertha is born both a woman and a colonial and racialised other, hence her ultimate demise. *Wide Sargasso Sea* shares similar plot patterns with the postcolonial and Bedouin texts. The protagonists' journeys all culminate in madness mainly because of Empire and colonial contact. Self-identity is explored under the lens of race and gender; and the final outcome is a quest for freedom, an attempt to break free from the social restraints that have kept them subordinated and oppressed. Antoinette's suicide is calculated in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, when she understands that she must escape from the attic and Rochester's England. Her sense of emancipation is evident: "The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings" (Rhys 123). Madness and death offer an alternative to the pressures of patriarchy and colonialism. Madness and physical disability (in the case of Fatima) threaten society's definitions of normal; as such, the female protagonists are able to disrupt society's oppressive notions – even if the breakthrough also constitutes the heroine's breakdown.

Madness and death emerge as textual strategies to give voice to marginalized and silenced women. After the characters go mad, are annihilated, or die, we are left with a lack of

closure. There is a feeling of unrest, and no traumas are healed. Maha and Um Saad are left in a mental asylum, forever screaming at the English doctor, yet that is their tragic ending. Fatima in Al-Tahawy's *The Tent* is left completely disabled and mad, crawling around the tent and forever exiled. She states: "Fatim the cripple doesn't need anyone...I can hear the girls outside making fun of Fatim...making fun of my deformity" (130). The dialogue between the oppressed and the oppressor is never over. All four writers leave us with a sense of awareness of the pivotal role of these fictional characters in their rebellion. They are embodied agents that attempt to criticise and subvert interlocking systems of oppression: patriarchy, colonialism and neo-colonial relations of power. Whether they succeed or not is not the question at hand; these madwomen figures are able to push at the boundaries of sanity/insanity and normalcy.

There is a need to remain vigilant about the temptation of romanticizing madness and death. I am aware of the limitations of my study; it remains only one study based entirely on fiction and concerned primarily with literary representations of madness. I have been careful not to glorify or celebrate real clinical madness and as such I have chosen to focus only on mad characters in fictional texts. My goal has been to illuminate the commonalities between 'mad' Eastern and Western women and their experiences; as such, these women writers in the Anglophone tradition have employed the same strategy of seizing upon madness as a tool of resistance. Madness in the four texts is an act of protest. The literary attitude of the Brontës, Rhys, Roy, Faqir, and Al-Tahawy towards these mad female protagonists is one that considers madness as protest and revolution; it is sympathetic as well as celebratory.

I have tried to explore and enhance the literary tradition of the madwoman by bringing together different works from different time periods and cultures. Throughout my thesis, I have been drawing comparisons between the protagonists' experience of madness. In all of the texts,

there is evidence of the inextricability of Empire and patriarchal ideologies. They are almost synonymous, and this oppression manifests itself in the psyche. Through a close reading of the texts, my aim has been to elucidate the ways in which madness features as both a result of patriarchy and colonialism, as well as a reaction to patriarchal and colonial cultures. Madness is represented as an imperial or colonial effect on indigenous patriarchy. Empire ideologies of race, gender, and class oppression further fuelled indigenous patriarchy. The relationship between 'home' (the Empire) and 'abroad' transferred poisonous systems of oppression. Women at home and abroad both suffered the consequences of the imperial mission. Madness surfaces as a violent response and as protest. There are of course, many questions that this thesis raises and has only just begun to answer. Further inquiry into the significance of East/West relationships is necessary to trace the rise of the Eastern and Western madwoman. This thesis has started a long overdue dialogue between the two (supposedly dissimilar) experiences of Eastern and Western madwomen.

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