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**“Saving brown women”: Cultural contests and narratives of
identity**

Saliba, Therese, Ph.D.

University of Washington, 1993

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"Saving Brown Women": Cultural Contests
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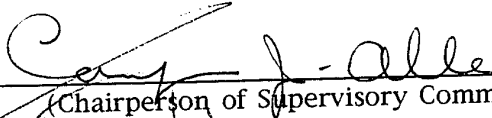

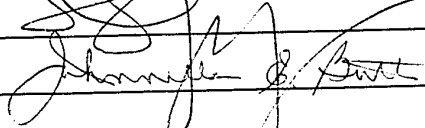
by
Therese Saliba

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

1993

Approved by 
(Chairperson of Supervisory Committee)


Program Authorized
to Offer Degree English
Date Aug. 18, 1993

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Abstract

"Saving Brown Women": Cultural Contests
and Narratives of Identity

by Therese Saliba

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From the literature of empire through contemporary cultural production, "brown women" have been alternately fetishized, objectified, and absented within dominant discourse. In this dissertation, I examine western constructions of third world women, particularly Arab women, and their resistant narratives and theories to argue how third world women's subjectivity has been limited by, but also subversive of, the discourses of colonialist writers, hegemonic feminists, and postmodern culture.

Western representations of women and imperialism expose the complexities of gender and political relations in British works by Sir Richard Burton, Lucie Duff Gordon, and E.M. Forster, as well as in Virginia Woolf's anti-imperialist writings. I further examine U.S. media representations of Arab women during the Persian Gulf War, and the treatment of raced subjects in postmodern novels by Acker, Gould, Barth, and Pynchon, to expose how the fashion of "difference" covers over the power dynamics inherent in racial or cultural subjugation.

As a means of moving from western representations to third world narratives of identity, I include a personal chapter about my Lebanese grandmother. Arab American women's writing, as well as Morrison's Beloved and Kogawa's Obasan construct generational and racial female subjectivities grounded in the bonds of family and community. In

postcolonial women's writing, including El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero and Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions, the collective women's text operates as a curative story against colonial and patriarchal systems, which have fragmented women's struggle across class lines. In emerging debates, Arab feminists address nationalist and religious issues as "necessary contradictions" to Arab women's liberation. The Palestinian women's movement, for example, integrates the theoretical concerns of third world feminism and nationalism with women's daily lived experiences of resisting Israeli occupation.

Throughout this study, I employ and examine the writings of postcolonial critics, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, as well as those of third world feminists, particularly Leila Ahmed, Chandra Mohanty, Trinh Minh-ha, Nawal El Saadawi, and Hortense Spillers, in order to theorize the competing and contradictory sites of contestation for third world women and to draw connections between arenas of struggles.

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank my reading committee, Professors Johnella Butler, Kate Cummings, Terri De Young, and Susan Jeffords, for their encouragement and insightful comments. Many thanks to my chair, Professor Carolyn J. Allen, for heightening my consciousness and guiding me through the often circular paths to my arguments. Special thanks to Laura Brenner, who read every page of this work in various stages; without her ideas and suggestions, this would have been a much lesser work. And to Tom Wright, for his attentive editing, his humor, patience, and commitment to the struggle. Finally, I wish to thank my family: my parents, Helen and Ronald Saliba, for their continuous love and support; my brother Mark, for prodding me to explore the language, culture, and politics of my Arab heritage; and my sisters, Karen and Suzie, for listening, and for teaching me what sisterhood is about.

Introduction

"Everywhere in Saudi Arabia, Islam is Watching" reads the title of a recent New York Times article (6 Jan. 93). Below the headline, two Saudi women, wrapped from head to toe in their black *abayahs*, walk beneath the all-seeing gaze of the religious police, who, dressed "like desert nomads," reprimand women to conceal their stray hair and bare ankles. In a recent six month period, the New York Times featured three articles on Arab women, two of which focus on Saudi Arabia's restrictions on women as emblematic of Islam and conservative Arab traditions.¹ A second article, "Saudi Woman Who Fled Predicts Crackdown" (7 Feb. 93), describes the plight of a woman granted political asylum in Canada under a new law which provides refugee status to women persecuted as a result of their sex. In both articles, Saudi women, and by extension Arab women, are caught within the gaze of the U.S. reader and the discourse of exoticism that constructs them as the Other of "liberated" western women. Within this discourse, Arab women's bodies become a site of cultural contestation between so-called western modernization and traditional Arab-Islamic culture.²

In contrast, a third article, "Beliefs" (6 Feb. 93) describes a research project on women and Islam by an African American editor at National Public Radio, Joyce Davis. Given the kinds of images mentioned above, Davis "found it hard to reconcile news media depictions of Islam as totally hostile to women with the many intelligent, articulate and independent women she met [in her travels] who considered themselves to be loyal Muslims." Although she conducts her research within the typical framework of Islam, Davis' study counters western stereotypes of Muslim

women as passive, silent victims of their religion and culture. "As a black American," says Davis, "if I know my people can be so misunderstood by those around them, how much more the danger of stereotyping distant cultures and groups?"

Davis' comment suggests a common ground of understanding between women of color internationally, across cultural divides. Similarly, Chandra Mohanty defines "third world feminism" to include both women of color in what is known as the first world, and third world women in a global context. According to Mohanty, this "imagined community" of third world women "constitute[s] a viable oppositional alliance" because of their "*common context of struggle*" ("Cartographies" 4, 7). As a result of daily encounters with racism, colonialism, and imperialism, these women must contend with multiply exploitative structures, as well as with the stereotypes deployed to justify their subjugation. So although the geographical, cultural, or political contexts of their experiences vary widely, third world women often negotiate their struggles within a shared ideological context of opposition.

In this dissertation, I examine western constructions of third world women, particularly Arab women who have been excluded from much discourse by or about women of color within the United States. I further analyze third world women's resistant narratives and theories, drawing connections between the struggles of women of color across third world/first world boundaries. From the literature of empire through contemporary cultural production, "brown women" have been alternately fetishized, objectified, and absented within dominant discourse. In Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she deconstructs the imperialist dictum, "White men are saving brown women from brown men," to show

how women have been positioned as pawns in the colonialist contest played out between dominant, white and subjugated, brown men. I use Spivak's phrase in my title to emphasize the problematic construction of third world women as the passive, yet seemingly grateful recipients of rescue within a number of competing discourses, including western (neo)colonialism, hegemonic feminism, and third world nationalism.

"Woman, be my country, 'til my country be mine," sings Johnny Clegg, a popular U.S. rock singer who plays with Savuka, a South African musician. Third world women have often been marked as an emblem of the colonized country, the land conquered, the land lost, the fruitlessness of imperialism in an abundant land whose resources and crops are exploited by the West. Within third world nationalist movements, women are expected to bear the burden of culture and tradition. Feminist and nationalist interests collide both in the third world and in North America, where women of color have confronted hegemonic feminists for attempting to "save" them from a patriarchy they do not consider their enemy. The "saving" goes on at many levels: as part of the "civilizing mission" which assumes western cultural superiority; as part of the white feminist movement which had formerly overlooked the effects of imperialism and racism on third world women's lives; as an act of self-invention, what Hortense Spillers describes as the "need to strip off layers of meaning . . . in order to speak a truer word about myself" ("Mama's Baby" 65). The writings of third world women speak to how they have "refused salvation"³ in order to remake their own identities, to rescue their silenced histories, and to determine their own means of liberation.

Edward Said's Orientalism exposes the ideological apparatuses behind Orientalist study, its fabrication of ideological fictions and phantasms, its relentless reinforcement of and its complicity in what he terms the western "science of imperialism." Said, in shifting contemporary theoretical study "from the Left Bank to the West Bank" (Bhabha), has in many ways liberated the Arab world in western minds and opened up doors of resistance for peoples of Middle Eastern descent, as well as for other colonized peoples. I find Said's definitions of both "imperialism" and "culture" useful in this analysis, for Said posits culture as the "always already" of human experience, as a "process and hegemony" that marks a sense of belonging even as it designates boundaries between groups. In Culture and Imperialism, Said expands his definition of culture, to the forms of aesthetic and popular expression, including, "the arts of description, communication, and representation" that often claim autonomy "from the economic, social and political realms" even as they participate in reinforcing or resisting dominant structures (xii). According to Said, culture also operates as "a source of identity" that can become a weapon for asserting superiority over others, as well as a vehicle for assuming that "culture's" interests are "somehow divorced . . . from the everyday world" (xiii). Culture, despite its denial of political interests, has been directly complicit in bolstering up empires and creating a milieu that justifies repressive practices.

Said's genderless understanding of culture, however, fails to account for the ways in which gender relations have been used to define cultures and how women have served as icons in the battles between cultures. Western analyses of the third world tend to imbue "culture" with some

privileged explanatory power, and have often used the discourse on women's position within culture to camouflage their own political agendas.

For my purposes, the word "imperialism" includes colonialism's violent acquisition of land for economic exploitation, as well as the subjugation of indigenous peoples and cultures as practiced particularly by European powers of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. It describes as well the unequal relations of power based on various forms of exploitation and oppression in what Said calls this "age of continued imperialist structures" ("Third World Intellectuals" 31). Said argues that the United States has assumed the role played by the former imperial powers of Britain and Western Europe as "*the* dominant outside force."⁴ Clearly, the United States has extended its empire to the control of global politics, multinational corporations, and various modes of transnational cultural production, including the air waves of the mass media. The new empire, although outfitted in the armor of advanced technology, still often wears the old empire's clothes. For example, U.S. media reports on Arab women during the Persian Gulf War bear a remarkable resemblance to the colonialist fantasies of nineteenth-century British travel writers.

Within the manipulations of dominant discourse, "race," like "culture," functions as a sign of otherness that delineates boundaries and reinforces relations of power. In fact, in contemporary discourse on "cultures" of the third world, "culture" has superseded anthropological studies of "race" as a more covert form of racism. This is true in the case of Arabs, especially in the U.S., where they represent a kind of racial ambiguity. While Arabs in this country have been legally classified as "Caucasian," nineteenth-century travel writers, in contrast, depicted "Orientals" as racially and culturally other, early Syrian immigrants to the

U.S. were classified as "Asian," and Arabs in France and Britain are identified as "black." The question of Arabs and "race" exposes some of the limits of racialized discourse, and explains, in part, why Arab women have often been excluded from coalitions of women of color. I have chosen, however, to align Arab women with women of color because of Arabs' "third world" status, their lived experiences with racism, and the legacies of colonialism in the Arab world.

When we factor gender into the equation of culture and imperialism, strategies of domination or resistance become multifaceted, contradictory, and complicated. My concern with mainly heterosexual configurations of gender is, in part, a function of the dominant discourses I critique, wherein cultural relations are gendered in terms of male domination over feminized territories. Although the third world narratives I examine often assert a collectivity of women's resistance, these texts give minimal attention to issues of sexual difference. In the context of the Middle East, stereotyped by the West as a place of primitive and perverse sexuality, the topic of sexual difference becomes fraught with all kinds of problems and ideological premises: First, the theme of Arab male homosexuality has been popular, especially among gay western male writers traveling or residing in the region. Although such representations suggest that homophobia is less pervasive in the Arab world than in the West, this recurrent theme has been used to reinforce the feminization of Arab men and, by extension, Arab society as a whole. Second, in a blatant misreading of cultural practices, the West has tended to interpret the homosocial ordering of Arab society, or the segregation of the sexes, as "latent or overt homosexuality" (Malti-Douglas 15). Like western travel writers who imagined harem women engaged in "lewd acts" with one another, contemporary arguments

attribute an allegedly pervasive, covert lesbianism in Arab culture to the monolithic misogyny of Arab men, thereby confounding lesbianism with a mixture of western fantasy and racism. Third, while Arab literature has often been freely expressive of male homoerotics, it has been much more reticent about female homoeroticism. Any analysis of sexual difference in this context must consider these competing and overlapping discourses; and although I do not address them in this work, some significant analysis and discussion of lesbianism is beginning to be done by Arab and Arab American women alike.⁵ Yet although many lesbians of color in the United States are writing and theorizing about sexual difference, it remains a relatively silent issue in writings by third world women outside the first world.

My discussion of gender argues, among other things, how third world women's bodies have served as sites of cultural contestation, as battlegrounds for cultural conversion or preservation. Within the discourses of colonialism, imperialism, hegemonic feminism, and even postmodernism, racial difference has often been subsumed under the name of "gender" or "difference," thereby obscuring racist tactics of domination. Many third world feminists place gender among the destructive divisions that delineate positions of power and resistance (Mohanty), and include gender along with culture, race, class and nation in the equation of cultural relations. By confronting the assumptions of western feminists and insisting on feminist models that address all these factors, third world women have, in effect, shifted the locus of feminist theory from the first to the third world. Throughout this study, I employ and examine the writings of postcolonial critiques like Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, as well as those of third world feminists, particularly Leila

Ahmed, Chandra T. Mohanty, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Nawal El-Saadawi, and Hortense Spillers, among others to argue how third world women's subjectivity has been limited by, but also subversive of, the dominant discourses of colonialist writers, hegemonic feminists, and postmodern culture.

As I join in this alliance of third world women, I am also aware of my own hyphenated and hybrid Arab American identity which positions me on the borderlands of these third world dynamics. The disparate structure of this dissertation embodies this hybridity in its continuous change in strategies and approaches, and is guided by what Chela Sandoval calls "differential consciousness." This differential mode describes a political strategy of movement between various sites and tactics of resistance, in order to confront "shifting currents of power" (20). In this work, I move between sites of contestation for third world women--colonialist discourse, hegemonic feminism, "American media imperialism," racism, classism, indigenous patriarchy, nationalism, continued colonization, the erasure of identity, the silencing of history.⁶ I approach these "sites" through various narrative and analytical strategies, incorporating literary analysis of canonical and non-canonical texts, personal narrative, interviews, and cultural analysis, in order to break down the binarisms of imperialist structures and to draw connections between arenas of struggles. This differential mode and structure allows me to maneuver among the complex and often contradictory negotiations of third world women in relation to structures of domination.

I begin by looking at representations of gender, race, and culture from various western perspectives. Throughout this first section, I am

primarily concerned with those ambivalent writers who position themselves as resistant to dominant culture--the sympathetic traveler, the anti-imperialist feminist, the postmodernist,--yet also collaborate with oppressive structures in their representations of raced and gendered subjects. Nineteenth-century travel writers to the Middle East often employed the guise of women's rights, or "feminism in the service of colonialism" in order to justify colonial conquest (Ahmed, Women and Gender 151). By constructing Arab women as signs of the sensuality and degradation of Arab-Islamic culture and the veil as an obstacle to modernization, they effectively bound Arab women within the ideologies of culture, religion, and nation and limited the terms of women's resistance. Woolf's anti-imperialist writings, in contrast, dismantle the myths of empire and "colonial feminism" by exposing the "tyrannies" of the private English house as symptomatic of the oppressions of nationalism, capitalism, and militarism on women in the metropolitan centers. Woolf's representations of feminist individualism, however, neglect the concerns of third world women, and her arguments prefigure those used by some western feminists in their ethnocentric approach to third world women's struggles.

Within both postmodern cultural and literary production, "difference" as a fashion covers over the power dynamics inherent in racial or cultural subjugation. U.S. media discourse on the Persian Gulf War combines colonialist fantasies and feminist ethnocentrism to justify U.S. intervention in the Persian Gulf in terms of women's liberation, and to camouflage the war's destruction. The Arab woman functions as an absence to be filled in by her white female counterpart who speaks on her behalf to save her from Arab patriarchy. Similarly, the raced subject is

erased within postmodernist works by British and Anglo American writers, and spoken for by postmodernism itself. "Race" thereby becomes the site of this meta-revolution which creates a third world dystopia that confounds postmodern and postcolonial methods of theorizing race, elides parody and mimicry, and mistakes "becoming other" for otherness.

As a means of moving from the outside in, from western representations of Otherness, to third world narratives of identity, I include a personal chapter about my Lebanese grandmother whose story of immigrant life expresses another mode of travel across cultural boundaries. My experiences growing up on the margins of an Orthodox Lebanese community in Los Angeles help situate myself in relation to the following discussion of third world women and their resistant strategies of self-invention.

The writings by third world women, both in North America and in the third world, often embrace what Woolf has called the "false loyalties" of family, nation, and religion, as grounds of resistance against the forces of colonization, slavery, and racial marginalization. Arab American women's writing, as well as the novels by Toni Morrison and Joy Kogawa construct generational and racial female subjectivities grounded in the bonds of family and community. These writers recover their silenced histories and erased identities through individual and collective projects that provide alternative narrative practices for female self-representation. Their communal languages heal the racial wounds of violation and family separation, and provide a tool for political re-generation.

The various oppositional strategies expressed in the literatures and theories by third world women suggest a ground for theorizing resistance and restructuring social relations beyond hierarchies. In postcolonial

women's writing, the collective women's text operates as a curative story of decolonization that resists both the construction of indigenous women as sites of cultural impurity and the privileging of the postcolonial bourgeois women. Collectively, these women use their bodies and voices to rebel against colonial or patriarchal class systems, which have fragmented women's struggle across class lines. In contrast, the emerging debates among Arab feminists expose how culture, religion, nation, and class, become, once again, sites of contestation. While some Arab feminists embrace Orientalist modes of theorizing Arab women's liberation, others engage in formulating feminisms that address nationalist and religious issues as "necessary contradictions" to Arab women's experience. The Palestinian women's movement, for example, integrates the theoretical concerns of third world feminism with women's daily lived experiences of resisting Israeli occupation. In interviews collected from my 1991 travels to the occupied territories, Palestinian women tell how they are negotiating two seemingly contradictory agendas--feminism and nationalism. These women speak from the front lines of the struggle for decolonization in voices that have been too long silenced.

These chapters include experiential, analytical, and theoretical knowledge because I believe that oppositional critical work must engage with the political and historical context of a work's production and reception, as well as with daily lived experiences of struggle. The "culture of resistance" (Said), after all, embraces a number of cultures and oppositional strategies, including those deployed by third world feminists discussed in this work. It is my hope that these tools and methods of resistance should lead us towards the decolonization of "subjugated

knowledges" (Foucault) and subjugated cultures, in order that international understanding replace the existing hierarchies of knowledge and societies.

Notes to Introduction

¹The three New York Times articles I discuss are as follows: Chris Hedges, "Everywhere in Saudi Arabia, Islam is Watching," 6 Jan. 1993: A4; Clyde H. Farnsworth, "Saudi Woman Who Fled Predicts Crackdown," 7 Feb. 1993: A7; Peter Steinfels, "Beliefs," 6 Feb. 1993: A12.

²This limited focus on Saudi women exemplifies three significant strategies in western constructions of Arab women: First, the veiled Saudi woman comes to stand in for all Arab women; her presence is negated by the veil, which signifies the general oppression of women within Arab-Islamic culture. Second, the United States support of those Arab regimes, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, that have been the most repressive against women's rights and minority rights, is never mentioned, much less interrogated within this discourse. Third, despite U.S. support of these regimes, the plight of Arab women is framed as a struggle between western modernization and Arab backwardness.

³Mohanty borrows the phrase "imagined communities" from Benedict Anderson. See Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (New York: Verso Books, 1983).

⁴Lata Mani uses this phrase in her essay, "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception." Mani addresses how colonial discourse in India formed the debate on sati, "producing troubling consequences for how the 'women's question' in India was posed later" (5-6). Mani's mediations of the competing discourses that surround the issue of Indian women and sati have informed my analysis of the discourses that bind Arab women within the ideologies of culture, nation, religion, and feminism.

⁵Said, Culture and Imperialism, 55. For further discussion of this see especially "American Ascendancy: The Public Space at War," in Culture and Imperialism, 282-303.

⁶See, for example, the writings of Arab American lesbian, Joanna Kadi, or the upcoming conference presentation by Deborah Najor, "A Western Presence?: The 'Lesbian' Subject in Arab Culture," American Studies Association, Boston, November, 1993.

⁷I borrow the term, "American media imperialism," from Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism, 292.

PART I: Gender, Culture, and Imperialism: Collaboration and Resistance in Representation

As far as I understand it, the notion of textuality should be related to the notion of the worlding of a world on a supposedly unscribed territory. When I say this, I am thinking basically of the imperialist project which had to assume that the earth that it territorialised was in fact previously unscribed. So then a world, on a simple level of cartography, inscribed what was presumed to be unscribed. Now this worlding is also a texting, textualising, a making into art, a making into an object to be understood.

--Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, The Post-Colonial Critic

Chapter 1: Sacred Spaces and Sacrilege: Imperialist Transgressions of Arab Women's Bodies

It can be safely assumed that the less woman is estimated amongst a people, the lower is the stage of their civilization. The respect woman is held in is in proportion to the degree of culture, and rises with it; hence the equality of woman with man amongst the nations at the head of civilisation.

--The Chevalier de Hesse-Wartegg, Tunis, 1899

There is no intrinsic or necessary connection between the issue of women and the issue of culture, as the history of Western feminism shows. The Western legacy of androcentrism and misogyny, though differing in its specificities, is nevertheless, generally speaking, no better than that of other cultures, including the Islamic.

--Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam, 1992

The black veil cut straight above her accentuated brow covers her head and hair, falling past her shoulders, enveloping her body. Her dark eyes stare out at the camera, her nose and mouth covered by a *burqu*, a long, triangular cloth that hangs down from the bridge of her nose and comes to a point between her breasts--two nipple-eyed breasts, exposed completely to the camera. The caption reads, "Scenes and Types--Arabian Woman with Yashmek." As if this were an everyday pose by an Arab woman, the colonial photographer penetrates the concealing garment and transforms the woman in his studio into a picture postcard (Graham-Brown, Images of Women 136).

Because of such unfavorable and often pornographic European imperialist representations of Islam and Muslim women, Ottoman officials issued a decree in 1900 banning the introduction or sale of images depicting God or Muhammed, the holy places of Islam, or Muslim women (Graham-Brown 44). The equation of women with the sacred spaces of culture and women's violation with the desecration of culture is not

exclusive to the Arab-Islamic world; "brown women" have served as cultural icons in the battle between cultures for white and brown men alike. Imperialism, as "an act of geographical violence" (Said, Culture 7), transformed the indigenous woman's body into a site of conquest, her violation signifying the abduction of land and the deformation of culture. The Ottoman decree exemplifies a response to such colonialist interventions and corruptions, a resistance narrative created to protect culture by securing its most sacred spaces--its women.

The "civilizing" missions of European colonialism situated the discourse on women and culture under the guise of religion, morality, and modernization in order to camouflage and legitimate colonial expansion. The specific gendering of Arab culture as female served to fetishize the land, Islam, and Arab women and so bound women implacably to culture by imbuing their violation and protection with the sacred significance of cultural conversion or preservation. The constructed images of Arab women as the "other" of Western women served not only to support the superiority of Western culture, but also to confound the ideologies of religion, culture, and nation, and to bind Arab women within this ideological confusion. In this chapter, I investigate the recurring tropes and competing discourses on Arab women within nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western travel writings in order to dismantle the imperialist myth of "brown women" as the grateful recipients of imperialist rescue. Within colonialist discourse, the Arab woman is reduced to a symbolic function, and constructed as a passive sign of culture rather than as an active participant in the formulation of culture. Such representations have also reinforced woman's symbolic function in debates

on "the woman question" within resistant Islamicist and nationalist discourses.¹

Colonialist Fantasies and Fetishes

In beginning my analysis with a religious paradigm, particularly that of Islam, I realize the danger of playing into colonialist discourse, which "gives religion a privileged explanatory power" by subsuming Arab women under the monolith Islam and denying women any "self-presence" or "being" (Lazreg 83, 87). My purpose, however, is to wrest these representations from their binding constructions by exposing the process of fetishization, which operates on notions of the the sacred and profane, as part of the colonial mission itself. The religious paradigm is further deployed by the imperialist project to disguise its own exploitative designs in terms of salvation. As Edward Said writes, the rhetoric of salvation serves to spare the colonizer from acknowledging the results of colonialism: "'We' are saved because first of all we needn't look directly at the results of what we do" (Culture 69). In the quest of "saving brown women from brown men," western men and women participated often on different terms and for purportedly different ends. Women who felt themselves excluded from the civilizing mission because they resisted the militarism of colonialism or because they were barred from activities of exploration and conquest, could participate in either the moral mission in the name of religion, or the liberation mission in the name of women's rights. Thus the terms of salvation often determined the sacred or profane interpretation of cultural practices on both sides of the colonial equation, exposing the process of fetishization inherent in various forms of domination and resistance.

The colonial postcard described in the opening of this chapter provides one example of this process of fetishization. In The Colonial Harem, Malek Alloula explains how the veiled woman stands as an obstacle to Western "potency." The veil signifies the closure of private space which is extended into the public space of the colonial photographer who is denied access to this space (13). Like the eye of the camera, the female gaze pierces through the veil, frustrating the photographer and negating both his desire and the practice of his art. The photographer/colonizer, powerless to create any realistic representation of the woman, in effect, disavows his own impotency by subjecting the Algerian woman to his violent exoticism of her within another private space, that of his studio. Through the degraded image in the picture postcard, the West makes the Orient visible in the West's own terms, as a half-naked captive of the harem, now a Western harem secured by the proliferation of forbidden ["haram" in Arabic] images of women.

The colonial photography industry in the Middle East flourished from 1900 to the 1930's, during a period when the British and French empires had secured nearly all of the Middle East and North Africa under their rule.² The colonial photographer, often complicit with the tourist industry in enticing travelers to the Middle East, produced phantasms of visual pleasure and desire through visual mastery and voyeuristic violence. Yet, contrary to the popular exoticisms of the Orient portrayed in picture postcards, literary representations performed another kind of violence. Travel writers, freed from the constraints of producing visually desirable images within a studio, often sought to surpass the proclaimed realisms of the photographic "eye" with the purported realisms of anthropological "objectivity." Furthermore, many of these writers traveled

during the age of colonial expansion, before these territories had been conquered; thus while colonial postcards depicted the violent possession of Arab women, travel writings took other forms of misogyny--especially the inversion of such erotic fantasies. Veiled Half-Truths³, an anthology of Western travelers' perceptions of Middle Eastern women by Judy Mabro, includes numerous accounts of Arab women as licentious, "unnatural creatures" (31), or as animals, witches, vampires, and ugly hags. For these travelers, the veil concealed not the object of desire, but the undesirable; it shrouded the Arab woman's ugliness, her uncleanness, and haggard looks.

These misogynist stereotypes operate on the denial of desire, yet originate from the same impulse as the pornographic fetish. Homi Bhabha argues for reading "the stereotype in terms of fetishism" . . . for it "functions to 'normalize' multiple beliefs and split subjects that constitute colonial discourse as a consequence of its process of disavowal" ("The Other Question" 161). In other words, the colonial subject is fixed through fetishism/stereotypes in order to disavow the desire which threatens "castration" or the loss of power within the relationship of domination. Bhabha's model explains how the tensions between the desired and undesirable expose the anxieties and ambivalences of colonial relations; yet because Bhabha regards all structures in terms of sexuality, he fails to deal specifically with the gendered colonial subject (Young 154). Alloula, in contrast, fails to account for images of undesirability, but rather reads the fetishized images of women's bodies as the spoils of colonial victory, signifying the defeat of a male society that no longer exists (122). For Alloula, the fetishized female subject is *effaced* in order to *embody* the colonial struggle.

These interpretations of fetishism are further complicated by reading "fetishism" within its historical context. The term "fetissism" was originally used by anthropologists to describe the "native" religions of "primitive" peoples. Nineteenth-century Orientalist Richard F. Burton defines "fetissism" as the earliest religion which "contains no traces of a Godhead or a Creator" and traces its origins to the religions of ancient Egypt, which he describes as "now puerility" (The Jew, The Gypsy, and El Islam 294). Although Burton argues that Islam is a theistic, not a fetishistic religion, most nineteenth-century Western constructions reduce Islam to a religion of fetishism, a primitive practice of perverse sensuality that binds women as slaves to men's passions. Such interpretations of Islam as "fetishism" fulfill colonial fantasies, even as they serve to disavow the operations of Western fetishization of Islam and Muslim women within colonial discourse. By reducing Islam to a fetishistic religion and elevating Christianity, the colonial writer, in effect, denies his own process of fetishization as he asserts the superiority of Western culture. The Chevalier, whose assessment of Islam appears in the epigraph of this chapter, iterated the sentiments of many travelers in the Middle East who attributed the inferiority of the Arab race to Islam and to the position of women within the religion: "They have adhered firmly to the laws of their religion for twelve hundred years, and for twelve hundred years the position of their women has remained the same" (qtd. in Mabro 190). Women, therefore, served as signs of the backwardness of Islamic cultures in a region consistently depicted as timeless and unchanging since biblical days or the epoch of The Arabian Nights.

Western travel writers, both men and women, portrayed Arab women as passive signs of culture, or, as written in Cook's Handbook for Algeria and

Tunisia (1913), as "the repository of all the accumulated nonsense of the race" (qtd. in Mabro 193). Their rituals of narrative domination often took the form of moral commentary upon the lewd activities of Arab women. Because private homes and harems were off limits to male travel writers, these writers generally had contact with dancers or prostitutes whose actions were often interpreted as the moral degradation of a civilization in decline. Belly dancers in North Africa are depicted as women who take "pleasure in the most lewd poses," "revolting to European ideas of feminine charm," and "the voice of sex crying in the wilderness" (qtd. in Mabro 133, 120). The lasciviousness of Arab women purportedly resulted from the tyranny of Arab men who enslaved women as their playthings. In The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians (1860), Edward William Lane, for example, blamed women's "licentious conduct" on their husbands who in their "disgraceful conduct" seek to "increase the libidinous feeling of their wives by every means in their power" (303-5, qtd. in Mabro 144). The perverse sexuality of Arab women could be directly attributed to the seclusion of women within the culture; yet like the picture postcards, the pornographic element in these writings says more about Western male desires than about the women themselves. Other writers claimed that Arab women's lack of "moral code" justified their position within Muslim society, arguing the "the liberty which European women enjoy would, among Muslims, lead to shocking profligacy."⁴ Such arguments, which reinforced the bonds between women and culture, were extended to the now feminized Arab society in general to assert that Arab peoples would morally deteriorate without the constraints of Western colonial rule.

Arab women thus came to represent the passivity, sensuality, and irrationality of Arab culture, as juxtaposed to the Western traveler's activity,

morality, and supreme rationality. These writers' failure to see women as active participants in the formulation of culture and cultural practices led to numerous accounts of Arab women languishing in boredom in the confines of their homes. European women's depictions of the inactivity of Arab women served to justify the Western woman's presence, whose visit was presumably a welcome interruption in the otherwise monotonous lives of Arab women.

But when all is said and done, the position of women in this country is deplorable. To bathe and dress, to smoke and eat, are their sole occupations. Hardly any can read or write, and their time hangs so heavily on their hands that the greatest kindness you can do is to go and pay them a visit, if only to kill half an hour or so. (Lady Herbert, A Search after Sunshine, 1872, qtd. in Mabro 261)

The charitable gestures and chivalric displays performed by Western women and men abroad, however, covered over the barbarisms of colonialism as well as the misogynist constraints of Western patriarchy that bound Victorian women under what Virginia Woolf calls "the tyrannies" of "the private house" (Three Guineas 142). The many travel writers who asserted that women are to be read as signs of the level of civilization obviously ignored the struggles of their countrywomen and the conditions of working class women in Europe. In Women and Gender in Islam, Leila Ahmed argues that the fusion between women and culture in the Middle East was created by nineteenth-century Orientalists who combined the languages of colonialism and feminism to assert that only Other men oppress women, and to "render morally justifiable [the West's] project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples"

(151). Hypocritically, their claims for women's independence abroad coincided with their increased constraints on women at home and acts of violation against "brown women" in the colonies. While Bhabha and Alloula explain the psychological operations behind representations of sexual and racial otherness to show how the West is deployed within them, Ahmed's argument explains the political motivations behind the conflation of women and culture within colonialist discourse.

Woman as Passage to Culture

In order to demystify the processes of imperialism that bind women to culture, I will now examine the writings of two British travelers--Sir Richard F. Burton and Lady Lucie Duff Gordon--who positioned themselves as resistant to the dominant discourses of other Western travel writers, especially in their estimation of Islam and Arab cultural practices. Both writers record their travels through the Middle East during the decades of European expansion (1850-1860's), just prior to the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. Although their writings often reinforce the dictates of imperialism, they position their discussion on Arab women outside the usual tirades against Islam, sometimes unsettling claims of Western superiority, and confounding the binary structures of Orientalism, of self and other, East and West, us and them. In their writings, Burton and Duff Gordon both criticize and reproduce imperialist ideology and operate as both resisters and collaborators, of sorts, in the imperialist project.

In his Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah (1862), Sir Richard Burton records his "penetration" of the Islamic holy places, forbidden to "unbelievers," in the guise of a Muslim pilgrim. In the introduction of this text, Burton's editor describes his Narrative as "a

welcome addition to our knowledge of these hitherto mysterious *penetralia* of Mohammedan superstition . . . In fact, El Madinah may be considered a virgin theme" (I: xxv). This metaphor of sexual domination and violation suggests that cultural knowledge stands dangerously close to cultural violation, and parallels colonialist fantasies of woman as a passageway to culture. In "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," Hortense Spillers explains how dominant discourse positions woman, particularly the black woman, as "vestibular to culture":

She became . . . the principle point of passage
between the human and the non-human world. Her
issue became the focus of a cunning difference--
visually, psychologically, ontologically--as the route
by which the dominant male decided the distinction
between humanity and "other." (76)

What strikes me about Spillers' definition are the metaphors of travel, "passage," "route," that encode cross-cultural movement, and how, within this movement, the black woman becomes a space of entry into culture--a vestibule, a cavity leading into other inner spaces, much like the vestibule of a church, a mosque, the sacred spaces of culture. This space points to the "profane and sacred" within culture, the site of disturbing sexuality and its denial. The vestibule, furthermore, is neither here nor there, neither within culture nor outside of it, suggesting that those who seek to enter culture through "woman" remain within this empty space. "Woman" as an empty sign allows travelers to keep their distance from culture even as they imbue woman with imperialist notions of the culture that render woman non-human.

The process or route to domination through the illegitimization of the Other, of course, operates differently within the colonial context than within the continuing slave structures of the United States. One major difference is the association of woman with land to be conquered; because the colonials occupied "native" land, feminization of that land became the operant metaphor of colonial subjugation.⁵ In the theft of the land by colonial domination, woman's body signifies a cultural and political territory that is about to be or already has been abducted. The picture postcards--bought for a small price, inscribed with tales of travel, and sent back "home" for the voyeuristic pleasures of family and friends--signify a form of abduction. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, the overly feminized, veiled Arab woman creates a disjuncture in the methods of domination because of her inaccessibility. To repair this disjuncture, either she is reconstructed as accessible through pornographic images, or, I would add, her desirability is negated.

Although her condition is much different from the African woman under slavery, many travel writers describe the Arab woman as enslaved within her own culture and read Islamic cultural practices as a form of slavery. According to one woman traveler, "Few positions in life, not even excepting American slavery, can be so utterly wretched as that of the very poor Arab woman" (Mrs. G. Albert Rogers, Winter in Algeria, 1865, qtd. in Mabro 183). The veil and harem served as metonyms for captivity in the Western mind, and fed the travelers' phantasms of unveiling and stealing knowledge of these forbidden territories. Rather than allowing for the exchange of cultural knowledge, these constructions of women as "vestibules of culture " merely enacted rituals of transgressive knowledge and domination.

Similarly, Burton's pilgrimage and the writings in his Narrative straddle this line of cultural knowledge and violation; however, his position is complicated by the complex relationship he maintained to the Middle East and its cultures. His outspoken critique of European "civility," his sympathy and identification with Arabs, his fluent knowledge of the language and culture, and his masquerading as one of them, all suggest that Burton's allegiances to England were ambivalent. Regarding women, he admits that they are "a marketable commodity in barbarism as in civilization" (II: 111); yet his comparison places the Middle East under the category of "barbarism" and England under "civilization." As Said describes him, Burton was a "rebel against authority" and identified strongly with "the East as a place of freedom from Victorian moral authority" (Orientalism 195). However, as an agent of imperialism who sells out the Arabs to the British government, Burton's rebellious eccentricities are overruled by the imperialist impulse behind his work.

In a lecture presented upon his return to London, Burton said: "If I have done anything new, it is this--my pilgrimage was performed as by one of the people" (Four Lectures, ms.). Burton's claim to originality and authenticity relies on his "inside" perspective of the culture and religion; yet he is simultaneously aware of the performative nature of his engagement with the culture, by which he presumably maintains an objective distance. Ironically, Burton travels as a *Darwaysh*⁶ and doctor, taking as his title "*al-Hajj Abdullah*," pilgrim servant of God. He explains his choice of disguise as "proper to the Moslem world" because it is assumed by peoples of "all ranks, ages, and creeds. . . Further, the *Darwaysh* is allowed to ignore ceremony and politeness, as one who ceases to appear upon the stage of life" (I: 14). Burton thus assumes a "disguise" assumed by

many people of the culture, which allows him to simultaneously be an off-stage observer, and to perform as the hero of his self-composed adventure. Detection of his identity, however, would probably have cost him his life, therefore, much was at stake in his performance and claims to authenticity (Pratt 205).

The "religious" nature of his quest, to penetrate those sacred places forbidden to unbelievers, parallels the shrouding of the intentions of Empire beneath religious and moralistic claims of the "civilizing mission." Burton claimed to feel disdain for Victorian "civility"; however, the guise of sanctity employed by the Empire and by Burton alike, is exposed when Burton describes Egypt in terms of economic gain as "a treasure to be won" (I: 112). . . the most tempting prize which the East holds out to the ambition of Europe" (I: 114), and justifies his claim to this prize by asserting that Egyptians "long for European rule" (I: 111). Burton's travel is guided by particular goals and prejudices that expose conquest as a necessary aspect of exploration, an intention masked by the fictions of romantic travel and adventure maintained to justify domination. The avowed purpose of his pilgrimage is to "remov[e] . . . the huge white blot which in our maps still notes the Eastern and Central regions of Arabia" (I: 1), in other words, to conquer these regions for the British Empire.

The "textual" knowledge produced in Burton's texts effectively captures the region's landscape and its people within the European discourse of domination that justified colonial intervention in the late nineteenth-century. Throughout his narrative, Burton's claims to objectivity are undercut by his egotism and his tendency to romanticize Arab culture as the obverse of European industrialization and repression. He asserts, "I make no apology for the egotistical semblance of the

narrative" (I: 5); and yet his explanations of Arab culture tend to say more about himself than the people he purports to represent. In the introduction to his *Narrative*, he proclaims, "*Ziyadeh hadd-i-adab*" or "Let us increase the limits of literature!" Resonant in this proclamation is the very imperative of Empire, "Let us increase the limits of Empire!" The "discovery" for explorers like Burton involved claiming for the mother country land already familiar to indigenous peoples. This meant "converting local knowledges (discourses) into European national and continental knowledges associated with European forms and relations of power" (Pratt 202). Thus, increasing the limits of literature was implicitly tied to imperial conquest.

Burton's minutely detailed narrative descriptions translate his "discovery" of territories into color coded spaces on the British map, and render the landscape into a well ordered painting.⁷ The region's inhabitants, particularly the women, however, deflected both visual and textual mastery for a number of reasons. As Alloula explains, the veiled woman was inaccessible to the traveler's sight. The cultural practice of segregation of the sexes, also known as the "homosocial order" of Arab society, tended to limit male travelers' contact with local women. Furthermore, although Burton himself was often accused of "turning Turk" and insists himself that he has taken his pilgrimage "as by one of the people," Orientalists, anthropologists, and travel writers were considered to lose their objectivity in their representations of "other" cultures if they admitted to liaisons with indigenous women. In Trinh Minh-ha's words, "The proper anthropologist should be prevented from 'going over the hill,' should be trained for detachment in the field if he wishes to remain on the winning side" (*Woman, Native, Other* 55). While many male writers depict

the flirtatious foreplay of such liaisons which undoubtedly occurred, the actual encounters remain absent or suspended in the silence between the ellipses of the text. Compared with his tedious attention to detail throughout his two volume narrative, Burton's descriptions of women are few and contradictory, because his explorations are part of an exclusive, male game, and because such revelations might betray his identity as an anthropologist masquerading as a holy man.

Burton's depictions of Middle Eastern women, however, offer more complexity than the usual diatribes against Islam, because he often defends Islam and the position of women within Arab culture. For example, in The Jew, The Gypsy, and El Islam (1898), Burton writes to dispel the common misperception that "the Muslim Prophet denied immortal souls to women, and therefore degraded them to the mere instruments of man's comfort and passions" (326). This erroneous Western interpretation rather served to disavow Western fetishization of the Arab woman by which she became an instrument of Western men's desires. Burton asserts that this misinterpretation of Islam is based on the assumption that its followers' minds are "undeveloped and uncultivated [and] unripe for a religion of principles" (322). Furthermore, he justifies the practice of polygamy as necessary to "hot and enervating climates [where man] coming to to maturity early, and soon losing powers" must take his many wives while young in order to preserve the race (327). Although Burton's pseudoscientific explanation here allows for a logic that different cultural practices are produced by cultural conditions, it exemplifies Burton's tendency to impose yet another stereotypical Western interpretation on the Arabs, rather than looking for explanations within the culture itself. In this case, he misses the more accurate historical explanation: During the

time of Mohammed and the spread of Islam, many men died in battle, so that the women of a tribe significantly outnumbered the men. In order to secure a "family" for these widows, they were often taken in by cousins or other male tribal members. Burton, however, reproduces the stereotype that the desert sun of the Middle East causes people to "ripen" earlier than they do in the cold climes of the North. This trope of "early ripening" explained the general condition of Middle Eastern cultures, which flourished under the ancient Egyptians until the decline of the Moorish kingdom brought on by the rise of European powers. Polygamy, by Burton's account, functions as part of this myth of cultural preservation against natural forces (the sun) and the unnatural forces of European domination.

In this study, Burton also argues against Western charges that Islam is a "faith of pure sensuality" (322), and cites a number of reasons, "Above all things, which debars man from the charms of female society, making sinful a glance at a strange woman's unveiled face" (328). Burton's defense of Islam relies heavily on defending women's position within Islamic society. However, in his Narrative, the portrayals of women in the Middle East as animals, witch-like, shrill, ugly, and, at times, objects of intrigue, belie his own misogyny and his tendency to use women as vestibules through which he expresses his ambivalences toward Arab culture. For example, like many travel writers, he deploys Darwinian theory to represent the non-humanness of women of the Middle East. In the following description of Abyssian slave women, Burton appears to be describing horses rather than woman:

Living in rooms opposite these slave girls, and seeing them at all hours of the day and night, I had frequent opportunities of studying

them. They were average specimens of the steatopygous Abyssinian breed, broad-shouldered, thin-flanked, fine-limbed, and with haunches of a prodigious size. None of them had handsome features, but the short curly hair that stands on end being concealed under a kerchief, there was something pretty in the brow, eyes, and upper part of the nose, coarse and sensual in the pendent lips, large jowl and projecting mouth, whilst the whole had a combination of piquancy with sweetness. (I: 59)

Burton's use of animalistic traits is reserved exclusively for African women whom he perceives as lower on the evolutionary scale, revealing how imperialist stereotypes of "brown" and "black" women depended often on variegated levels of othering. But he also critiques Arab women for their lack of beauty which is disguised by the enticing veil:

Europeans inviegh against this article,--which represents the "loup" of Louis XIV 's time,--for its hideousness and jealous concealment of charms made to be admired. It is, on the contrary, the most coquettish article of woman's attire, excepting, perhaps, the *Lisam* of Constantinople. It conceals coarse skins, fleshy noses, wide mouths, and vanishing chins, whilst it sets off to best advantage what in these lands is almost always lustrous and liquid--the eye. Who has not remarked this at a masquerade ball? (I: 229)

In seeking to demystify the practice of veiling and the "charms" it is said to conceal, Burton compares the veil to similar European headress, however, one worn 500 years ago. Ironically, Burton, who is himself masquerading as a *darwaysh* in pilgrim garb, reads the veil as a form of masquerade that hides not beauty, but rather the natural deformities of the imperfect visage. Burton further identifies with the "eyes," the anthropological "I"

of the observer, that look out from the concealing disguise, and yet his description suggests that he has seen beyond the veils of these women to their concealed traits. Burton, in attempting to justify the practice of veiling to his English audience, does so by conflating cultural practices with his own form of performance, that of disguise, thereby reducing cultural custom to costume.

Burton's "monarch-of-all-I-survey" (Pratt 201) stance extends beyond the landscape to its inhabitants and particularly to women, upon whom he gazes and casts his judgment. Although he admits that the traveler is generally intrigued by the theme of women, he also finds Bedouin women disappointing, especially when compared to the "Fairies of the West":

. . . the reader will perceive with pleasure that we are approaching an interesting theme, the first question of mankind to the wanderer --"What are the women like?" Truth compels me to state that the women of the Hijazi Badawin are by no means comely. . . And I warn all men that if they run to Al-Hijaz in search of the charming face which appears in my sketch-book as "a Badawi girl," they will be bitterly disappointed: the dress was Arab, but it was worn by a fairy of the West. The Hijazi woman's eyes are fierce, her features harsh, and her face haggard; like all people of the South, she soon fades, and in old age her appearance is truly witch-like. (II: 85)

If women are indeed a primary curiosity to mankind and the traveler alike, it is curious that women are so absent in Burton's text, and that when present, Burton's primary concern is with what they look like and not their actions. Burton's sketch of "The Pretty Bedawi Girl" (given this title, although it is in fact a Western woman) suggests yet another form of

masquerade wherein the superior beauties of the West may appropriate the exoticism of the East--and improve upon the culture.

When Burton does finally find what he considers an attractive woman, his flirtations with her simulate another conquest. Burton finds himself at a tent during a religious ceremony that he plans to record, but is distracted by a "fairer body" of an upper-class Meccan "girl."

She was a tall girl, about eighteen years old, with regular features, a skin somewhat citrine-coloured, but soft and clear, symmetrical eyebrows, the most beautiful eyes, and a figure full of grace. There was no head thrown back, no straightened neck, no flat shoulders, nor toes turned out--in fact, no "elegant" barbarisms: the shape was what the Arabs love, soft, bending, and relaxed, as a woman's figure out to be. Unhappily, she wore, instead of the usual veil, a "Yashmak" of transparent muslin, bound round the face . . . Flirtilla fixed a glance of admiration upon my cashmere. I directed a reply with interest at her eyes. She then by the usual coquettish gesture, threw back an inch or two of head-veil, disclosing broad bands of jetty hair, crowning a lovely oval. My palpable admiration of the new charm was rewarded by a partial removal of the Yashmak, when a dimpled mouth and a rounded chin stood out from the envious muslin. Seeing that my companions were safely employed, I entered upon the dangerous ground of raising hand to forehead. She smiled almost imperceptibly, and turned away. The pilgrim was in ecstasy.

(II: 198)

The split in this passage between the "I" of the anthropologist and the third person shift to the pilgrim in ecstasy reveals how Burton attempts to textually distance himself from disruptions in his objective stance. The

switch in person provides the disavowal by which Burton extricates himself, the pilgrim, from this process of fetishization, and restores his authority as the anthropological narrator. The pinnacle moment of religious ecstasy that he as pilgrim experiences becomes rather the ecstasy of sexual violation, his entrance "upon the dangerous ground" of woman. Yet he attributes this violation to the holy man, disavows his desire, and returns to the "real" object of his cultural study, the landscape.

Upon his arrival in Al Madinah, Burton describes how he is struck by the number of women amongst the pilgrims at the Mosque, citing a change in attitudes toward the admission of women in holy places in recent decades (I: 434). Burton's assessment of women as active participants in Islam, contrasts sharply with Guy de Maupassant's, who describes the mosque as a boudoir, and the women worshippers as prostitutes:

This is no longer a severe, stark, mosque where there is only God; it has become a boudoir decked out for prayer by the childish taste of these wild women. Often gentlemen come here to arrange a rendez-vous or to exchange a few words in secret. Europeans who can speak Arabic sometimes come here to establish relations with these shrouded, slow-moving creatures, of whom one can see nothing but their gaze. (*La Vie Errante*, 1890, qtd. in Mabro 172)

Maupassant's version of the Mosque depicts a desecrated and decadent Arab culture, wherein infantilized, eroticized women prostitute themselves to Europeans. Burton, in contrast, is able to get beyond the Western ethnocentric discourse of the decadence and inferiority of Islam and Arab culture and its women held by many travel writers for two reasons: he holds at least some respect for Arab culture, and he writes in the 1860's, before colonialist discourse had completely fused woman with culture. His

portrayals of women, however, remain trapped within the masculinisms of his conquest; women, like the land he surveys, become the spoils of imperialist acquisition.

On Women's Accounts

With few exceptions, Western women travel writers were also complicit in this mastery of the Arab woman whom they sought to save by "rend[ing] the veil" and freeing from her "tyrannical" husband (qtd. in Mabro 184). Exoticized and devalued, the Arab woman serves as the other of "the 'English lady' [whose] self-sacrifice, moral influence, and innocence is extended to the social mission of colonialism" (Sharpe 34). In accepting this position as moral partners within the imperialist project, European women tended to identify entirely with the men of their own culture, and exhibited a shocking inability to deal with Arab women as women. Isobel Burton, the wife of Richard Burton, for example, was harsher in her assessment of Arab women than was her husband. Describing her experience in the *hammam* or bath, she points to the "disagreeable" old women with harsh voices who make an irritating noise, and remarks, "How thankful they ought to be for the institution of veiling!" (The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land, 1875, qtd. in Mabro 85). As she explains the role of women in England to a group of Syrian women, she stresses not only how very different their lives are, but also insists that they follow her list of wifely duties to ensure that their husbands never take another wife:

The woman must take as much pains to look pretty and dress well as she did before; and must love her husband, be very respectful to him, make his house bright and comfortable . . . she must be

constantly waiting upon him, and thinking what she can do to please him; she must also educate herself, that she may be able to be his companion, friend, adviser, and confidante, that he may miss nothing at home; and finding all that he can desire in his wife, he has nothing to seek elsewhere . . . she must take an interest in all his pursuits, and study them; . . . she must hide his faults from everyone, and always be at his side through every difficulty and trouble; she must . . . [never] reproach him when he is in the wrong; never be inquisitive about anything he does not volunteer to tell her. . . Above all, she must see that all his creature comforts are ready. The wife who follows this recipe, O Leila, is never put away. (qtd. in Mabro, 184-6)

Her prescription for the ideal marriage exposes how English men controlled their wives, and how women served to support patriarchy and imperial domination by maintaining the private house and providing their husbands with the proper living conditions to pursue their exploits. Ironically, in light of her husband's occupation which kept him always seeking things elsewhere, more often than not without her companionship, her comments confirm her own need to feel secure within her marriage. As "the proper English lady," Isobel Burton provided her husband unquestioning support of his quests and supported the role of women to uphold culture at home. Her argument to convert Arab women to a Victorian bourgeois model of familial relations is far from convincing--given her regimen of self-sacrifice, polygamy might in fact appear the lesser of two evils.

Although Western women could not participate directly in the male game of conquest and colonization, they often played the moral role of

seeking to redeem their sisters from what they viewed as oppressive cultural practices. Isobel Burton's admonishments against the terrible fate of polygamy were reiterated by numerous women travelers, who used such arguments to justify colonization as an advancement for indigenous women. In 1928, when Egyptian women were demonstrating in the streets, demanding the right of self-government, Trowbridge Hall insisted that their energies would be better spent abolishing the practice of polygamy:

O ye women, so splendidly, so nobly fighting for freedom, forget for a time all political strife. You have a task infinitely more important than the self-government of your country. Forget everything save wiping out polygamy, this hideous blotch besmirching your country's good name. (Egypt in Silhouette, 1928, qtd. in Mabro 13)

Such arguments served not only to negate Arab women's participation in the political realm, but also to argue against nationalist struggle, and to support imperialist attitudes that the constraints to freedom imposed by Western occupation in no way compared to those of indigenous cultural practices.

In contrast to women like Isobel Burton and Trowbridge Hall who sought to save Arab women from their culture, Lucie Duff Gordon traveled to Egypt in 1862 and developed a strong sympathy for Arabs. While Mrs. Burton was satisfied to travel in her husband's shadow, Duff Gordon traveled alone, seeking a warmer climate to treat her consumption. She settled in Alexandria and learned to speak Arabic, which allowed her more meaningful exchanges with the people. In her Letters from Egypt (1862-69), she explains polygamy not as "hideous blotch" (Hall) nor as protection

against the "early ripening" of Arab peoples (Richard Burton), but rather that

very often a man marries a second wife out of duty to provide for a brother's widow and children or the like. Of course, licentious men act loosely as elsewhere. (121)

Her assessment of the Arabs and their country changed over time; initially, she tended towards romanticism, describing Cairo as "the Real Arabian Night," and writing, "No words can describe either the picturesque beauty of Cairo or the splendid forms of the people in upper Egypt, and above all in Nubia. I was in raptures at seeing how superb an animal man (and woman) really is" (77). This romanticization easily slides into a form of infantilization, as the Nubians she describes are transformed from "superb animals" to children, "complete children, but amiable children" (52).

Influenced perhaps by colonial postcards, she suggests that she will get a hold of "a handsome *fellahah* [peasant woman] here, I'll get her photographed to show you in Europe what a woman's breast can be, for I never knew it before I came here--it is the most beautiful thing in the world" (115). Like Burton, the East for Duff Gordon signifies a land freed from the constraints of Victorian repressions. Her fascination with the other women's breasts, described as "gloriously independent of stay or supports" (115), betrays her desire, not of the woman, but of the woman's freedom from what was considered "civilized" fashion. In this sense, she sees women as vestibular to her own freedom, and like the colonialist photographer, seeks to capture this freedom in a photograph to send back home.

Although Duff Gordon maintains a distance from Arab culture, her discourse lacks some of the ambivalences of form and content so apparent

in Burton's work. Because she writes her portrayals of Arab culture in personal letter form and sends them to family members, and because she often records the words of Arabs themselves, she avoids that ring of imperial authority which resonates throughout Burton's "scientific" ethnography. Although her writings risked appropriation by British government, they were not, like Burton's, written to claim a land and its inhabitants for the Empire. Still, she believed her knowledge of Arab culture to be an important contribution to British society. On her death bed, she wrote, "I honestly believe that knowledge will die with me which few others possess. You must recollect that the learned know books, and I know men, and what is more difficult, women" (360).

The knowledge she claims is not textual, but experiential, like the knowledge of women's lives that is more difficult to obtain. She criticized the stereotypes perpetuated by Western writers' ignorance of the countries they travelled in and "of the people about whom they were so quick to make generalizations" (160). For example, she denounces Harriet Martineau for her bigotry and for depicting harems as brothels (120-21). Unlike these modern writers who "assume an impassable gulf" (120) between the indigenous Arabs and themselves, Duff Gordon sought to understand cultural practices from the Arab's perspective, and to give voice to Arabs' criticisms of the West, including their treatment of women:

How astonished Europeans would be to hear Omar's real opinion of their conduct to women. He mentioned some Englishman who had divorced his wife and made her frailty public. You should have seen him spit on the ground in abhorrence. Here it is quite blackguard not to forfeit the money and take all the blame in a divorce. (139)

While Burton formulated his own explanations to cultural practices, Duff Gordon sought them from within the culture. In contrast to Burton's depictions of women as the passive objects of his imperial gaze, Duff Gordon interacted directly with Arab women and portrayed them as active participants in many levels of society. For example, she recognized that women were outspoken about public affairs, and writes, "Arab women are outspoken, and might shout out their grievances to the great Sultan" (73). She met women "who had farmed large properties well and successfully" and finds this more common in Egypt than in England (240). She also describes an encounter with a Bedouin woman who travelled for ten years alone throughout Africa and Turkey with her dromedary:

No one seemed surprised, no one stared, and when I asked if it was *proper* our captain was surprised. "Why not? if she does not wish to marry, she can go alone; if she does, she can marry--what harm? She is a virgin and free." (110)

Although Duff Gordon came from a radical English background, notions of English propriety still formed her prejudices. Travel itself became a sign of action and adventure for women travel writers who often saw themselves as participants in life, and their brown sisters as passive recipients of their company and knowledge.

Yet contrary to the manipulations of most imperialist representations, Duff Gordon asserted that Arabs were not improved by European contact. She recognized that acts of European exploitation, including the expansion of railways and the building of the Suez canal, were "done under the pretext of improving and civilizing . . . and the poor *fellaheen* [peasants] are marched off in gangs like convicts, and their families starve, and the population keep diminishing" (85). She saw in the

Arab world a greater understanding of social equality, since there was more mobility across class lines than in England: "One must come to the East to understand social equality" (80). In attempting to untangle the confused ideologies of religion, culture, and nation, she tended to see many similarities between East and West: "I am very much puzzled to discover the slightest difference between Christian and Muslim morality or belief" (171). Can this woman, who dies in exile, have escaped the trappings of imperialism? Though her knowledge of Arab culture extends beyond the orthodox ethnocentric perspective shared by most travel writers, her faithful servant, Omar, who stands by her side at her deathbed (and is described as "heartbroken" in the epilogue), serves as a reminder that even women travelers cannot assume complete innocence by virtue of their gender.

Duff Gordon's writings, however, critical as they are of imperialist exploitation and Western ethnocentrism, offer an approach to cultural knowledge, a mode of travel, which may be less appropriative, less transgressive of indigenous cultures than those of other travel writers. Sir Richard Burton participated in the colonial scheme on another level. His pilgrimages to penetrate the sacred spaces of culture forbidden to unbelievers reveal that his quest for cultural knowledge *is* cultural violation, because of his imperialist designs to claim the Arab world for the British empire. Burton therefore fails to move beyond his position of conquest to one of rapprochement between cultures.

Rape or Nationalism in A Passage to India

In a circuitous route to conclusion, I would now like to travel some sixty years forward in time to the other Orient under British colonial rule--

India. Reading E.M. Forster's A Passage to India "contrapuntally" (using Said's term) with Middle East travel narratives, we see how both Arab and Indian women served a symbolic function in debates on colonialism and national independence. At the center of the novel, Aziz's encounter with Adela in the Marabar caves (a sacred space of ancient Indian religion) and her ensuing accusations of rape invert the colonial paradigm, which justified the rape of brown women and colonized lands, to the taboo of brown men raping white women. As in the travel narratives discussed above, the absent narrative of sexual relations with, or rape of, native women, implies that "the native woman is not rapable" and reserves the "category of rape . . . for the English woman alone" (Sharpe 34).

Within A Passage to India, the alleged rape of the white woman metaphorically points to the ultimate violation of imperial authority and Western culture. In contrast, the consistent portrayal of the "brown woman" as sensual, lewd, and lascivious, in travel narratives has served to justify her violation as something "she asks for." Such configurations of power accord white women a "sacred" position within culture, and relegate brown women to the "profane." One nineteenth-century travel writer went so far as to describe his fantasy of raping an Arab woman as the best way to "please" her:

The Arab wife has, as a natural result of her degraded position, very little delicacy, and no modesty whatever. She admires only that which is violent and energetic. Thus the best way to please her would be to penetrate, by strategem or otherwise, under her tent awning, and make love to her by the side of her sleeping husband. But were the husband to wake and kill his rival, she would not be sorry--her admiration would only be turned to another channel.

(The Hon. Lewis Wingfield, Under the Palms in Algeria and Tunis, 1868, qtd. in Mabro 146)

The writer justifies the rape by the Arab woman's "degraded position" within her own society. Contrasting her to the delicate and modest English woman, he imposes his fantasy of violence onto her, making his desires hers. The violation, compounded because it occurs by the side of her sleeping husband, renders the woman's body the booty of colonial victory and signifies the defeat of male society in the sleeping husband. Yet the threat of the husband waking in retaliation elicits merely the woman's indifference and fickleness. According to this version of rape, the woman is entirely void of feelings, except an aggressive passion; she is not "rapable" because she desires this aggression and because she cannot be possessed emotionally.

In A Passage to India, the central violation of rape of the white woman, which is later exposed as a potential phantasm of Adela's fears or desires, occurs within the frame of a discussion on Indian woman's position within society. This framing device reinforces the sexualization of colonial relations in two ways: it depicts the secluded Indian woman as the other of the European woman, and it also implicates nationalist struggle in the violence of rape.⁸ In an early scene, Aziz, lying in bed sick, is visited by Fielding, the sympathetic British traveler who describes himself as "a holy man minus the holiness." In a gesture of intimacy, Aziz offers Fielding a photograph of his deceased wife saying, "You are the first Englishman she has ever come before. Now put her photograph away" (109). This exchange of photographs, like the colonial postcard, positions women as bartering chips of intimacy between men. Edward Said reads Aziz's "odd *pudeur* with the pictures of his wife that he carries around" as a mere sign

of his Mediterranean otherness (Culture 202); yet the picture more importantly serves as a vehicle to discuss women's liberation as crucial to the debate of Indian nationalism. Fielding, more touched by the gesture than by the picture of the woman, thanks Aziz for the great compliment, to which Aziz responds, "You would have seen her, so why should you not see her photograph? . . . I believe in *purdah* [seclusion] but I should have told her you were my brother, and she would have seen you" (109). Fielding then questions whether "when the whole world behaves as [brothers], then there will be no more *purdah*" (110). This exchange between the "native" man and the British colonial signifies that decisions regarding women's position in society are dependent on debates argued among men--the weakened brown man (Aziz, sick in bed) and the more powerful colonial. More importantly, it asserts, with a question mark, that political conflicts, particularly between men, serve to reinforce the constraints on women.

As colonialist discourse forged a tenacious bond between women and culture, so the resistant narrative of nationalism made the liberation of indigenous women a topic of national debate (Ahmed 129). In the Middle East, particularly, where British officials sought to abolish cultural practices such as veiling, the unveiled woman became a sign of Western influence and modernization. Among Arab men, liberal reformists believed that European powers were able to dominate the Middle East not just because of modern technology, but because they had developed democratic social and institutions, including equality for women. The conservatives, in contrast, who thought Europe would strengthen its domination by imposing social strictures, grew suspicious of women's liberation which they thought would lead to a breakdown in tradition family structures, and ultimately, of the nation. While most sources

document men's involvement in the debate, some suggest that women were involved as well (Graham-Brown 30). In either case, these resistance narratives, which picked up on the colonial schema equating woman with culture, attempted to turn woman from a negative to a positive signifier of cultural practices. Within this reversal, as articulated by Islamic and nationalist movements, women were fashioned, respectively, as either the bearers of culture and tradition or as "living symbols of the independent state" (Woodhull 116).

The exchange between Fielding and Aziz, similarly, defines the "woman question" as a debate exclusively between men. Furthermore, the narrative of purported sexual violation at the center of A Passage to India suggests how the colonial relationship is encoded to "establish claims of lawful (sexual) ownership of women" (Sharpe 37), as well as to maintain the boundaries between cultures. As a result of the rape trial, Aziz develops "a genuine hatred of the English" (287), and at the same time, his attitudes toward Indian women are transformed. He turns to writing poetry, and his poems were "all on one topic--Oriental womanhood. 'The *purdah* must go' was their burden, 'otherwise we shall never be free'"(287). Although Aziz seems to accept Fielding's earlier formulation that the independence of women depends on a brotherly rapprochement between white and brown men, his insistence on Indian woman's independence--and on India's independence--is fostered rather by his growing hatred of the British and his increasing nationalist sentiments. Forster, furthermore, describes Aziz's poems about women as revealing the "pathos of defeated Islam" (287). The narration draws an insistent connection between women, culture, and religion, implying that if women are free, Islam must be defeated, the mosque is superceded by the cave.

Aziz's turn from religion to a nationalist model of liberation depends on his embracing Western conceptions of gender relations, for he "envied the easy intercourse that is only possible in a nation whose women are free" (302). After Aziz tells Fielding that he is getting his poems published, Fielding chides him with their message: "Yes, and what do they say? Free our women and India will be free. Try it my lad. Free your own lady in the first place, and see who'll wash Ahmed, Karim, and Jemila's faces. A nice situation" (315)! Fielding, in effect, criticizes Aziz's symbolic use of the freed Indian woman as an emblem of the liberated country by reminding him of the daily practicalities of women's liberation. The irony of this symbolism is heightened by the alleged rape which suggests that brown men do not know how to act around "liberated" women. Moreover, in his attempt to invert the symbolics of colonialist paradigm, Aziz fails to account for the vastly unequal power relations between himself and the white man. Aziz responds to Fielding's mockery by telling him to get out of here (India) and calls him a "Burton," referring to Sir Richard Burton who betrays the native people he claims to love for his own advantages. By positioning the nationalist question within the framework of rape and Indian women's liberation, Forster (like his hero Fielding) effectively attributes "anticolonial struggle to the pathological lust of dark-skinned men for white women" (Sharpe 42), and to brown men's desires to have brown women imitate white women. While nationalist debates often relegated indigenous women to a similar symbolic function, this symbolics cannot be removed from colonialist discourse and its insistent sexualization of colonial relations.

In dismantling the colonialist rhetoric which bound indigenous women to culture and positioned them as objects of imperialist rescue, we see how these colonial travel writers were hardly concerned with issues concerning women, but rather deployed women "as a ground for the development of other agendas" (Mani 18). These representations, which justified colonialist exploitation of the "Orient" in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, form a nearly cohesive discourse with current propaganda on the Middle East used to further imperialist political projects, such as the Persian Gulf War (a topic I discuss in chapter three).

Furthermore, colonialist rhetoric on women, culture, religion, and nationalism has strongly influenced the terms of several debates that I take up in later chapters--debates between Arab and Western cultures, in general, and between Arab and Western feminists, in particular; as well as debates within the Arab world between secular nationalists and Islamicists, and even debates within the emergent strains of Arab feminist movements. Colonialist discourses have often shaped the methods and discourses of anti-imperialist resistance; however, some resistant narratives that I examine in the following chapters suggest ways "to conceive of human experience in non-imperialist terms" (Said, Culture 276), and to travel across cultural borders without the baggage of Eurocentrism or the blinding gaze of the imperial eye.

Notes to Chapter 1: Sacred Spaces and Sacrilege

¹For a detailed historical discussion of how colonialist discourse set the terms of these debates, see Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam, especially chapters 7 and 8. To Ahmed's insightful socio-historical argument, I add a discussion of how Western literary representations participated in forming and reinforcing this discourse.

²By the early 1920's all of the Arab countries were under European rule, with the exception of some parts of the Arabian peninsula. See Albert Hourani, A History of Arab Peoples, esp. 319.

³Judy Mabro, Veiled Half-Truths: Western traveller's perceptions of Middle Eastern women. I am indebted to Mabro's thorough and laborious compilation of numerous travel writings in this text. When dealing with longer discussions of travel writers, I use primary texts; however, for the sake of giving the reader some sense of the variety of representations, I also quote several works cited in Mabro's anthology.

⁴Duc d'Harcourt, L'Egypte and les Egyptiens, (1893) 116-19, qtd. in Mabro, 150.

⁵In contrast to colonized peoples, African Americans were dispossessed of their land and brought to another land; they were not feminized but rendered genderless. Spillers explains this connection between "land" and "body" within imperialist discourse: In the theft of the body in which Africans lose gender difference "the male and female body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver." See Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," 67.

⁶*Darwaysh* is a wanderer, as Burton explains, "The vagrant, the merchant, and the philosopher, amongst Orientals, are frequently united in the same person" (I: 2). In English, *darwaysh* is translated as *dervish*, meaning any member of various Muslim groups dedicated to a life of poverty, chastity, etc.

⁷Mary Louise Pratt explains this process of ordering the landscape in terms of European designs in The Imperial Eye, 204.

⁸In "The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency," Jenny Sharpe argues that A Passage to India "racializes colonial relations by implicating rebellion in the violence of rape" (25), and situates the novel within the history of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Sharpe investigates the role of the colonial woman within the novel; she does not, however, discuss the novel's nationalist framing and the arguments about Indian women's liberation.

Chapter 2: The Mirrors of Modern Savagery and Feminist Anti-Imperialism in Virginia Woolf's Texts

In fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.

--Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas

It is the desperate moment when we discover that this empire, which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an endless, formless ruin, that corruption's gangrene has spread too far to be healed by our scepter, that the triumph over enemy sovereigns has made us the heirs of their long undoing.

--Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

That desperate moment of recognition of the empire's undoing is the "moment" of modernism. In this upheaval of empire's world order, the "nation" became "one of the major structures of ideological ambivalence," particularly as an authoritarian method of asserting cultural superiority and control over other nations and peoples (Bhabha, Nation and Narration 4). In Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said argues that the novel as a cultural form was complicit in maintaining and reinforcing imperialist structures, both in nineteenth-century realist works whose purpose was "to keep the empire more or less in place" (74); and in modernist texts which sought to hold the world together through artistic creation to counter the decay of empire (189). Virginia Woolf's novels and essays, however, consistently argue for the dissolution of imperialist social and political structures, as well as for non-imperialist modes of representation in art. According to Woolf, the myths of the British Empire's glories and heroisms serve to reinforce patriarchy and capitalism, two systematic modes of oppressing women, particularly in the metropolitan centers. Contrary to the women travel writers whose "feminism" became complicit in empire

and its assertions of Western cultural superiority, Woolf places the struggle for feminist identity and subjectivity as necessarily counter to nationalist and imperialist interests.

The concurrence of anti-imperialist movements and the women's movement against sexual imperialism is hardly coincidental, since both women and the colonized suffer at the hands of a patriarchal class system which asserts both economic and physical dominance over these marginalized groups. In Three Guineas (1938), her anti-war polemic, Woolf cites Lady Lovelace's claim that the price of "our splendid Empire . . . is mainly paid by women," implying *British* women, then follows with, "And who can doubt her, or that the price was heavy" (39)? Woolf's analysis of the costs of empire now appears Eurocentric and naive, for certainly the colonized paid much more dearly than women on the home front. According to Gayatri Spivak, feminist critical attempts to link the feminist struggle with the colonial struggle tend to "reproduce the axioms of imperialism" by appropriating the colonial struggle in the name of feminism ("Three Women's Texts" 243). Because Woolf's condemnation of imperialism is grounded in what Spivak terms "female access to individualism" (246), she at times falls into this trap of collaborating with the very structures she critiques. Woolf, after all, is primarily concerned with the effects of empire "at home" rather than abroad; therefore, she attacks the multiply oppressive structures of patriarchy, nationalism, capitalism, and militarism, and to a lesser degree, colonialism, as "tyrannies" that distort society and deny women economic as well as social freedom. Although Woolf does implicate British women in the machineries of empire, including colonialism and war, she also partially effaces their agency, as

well as her own, by constructing them as the primary victims of imperialist relations that are patriarchal alone.¹

Woolf's concern with oppression and domination, however, extends beyond the borders of England. In Three Guineas she decries nationalism which encouraged "the desire to impose 'our' civilisation or 'our' dominion upon other people" (109). Woolf describes the repressions of the private world of British women and those of the public world of Empire as connected: "The tyrannies and servilities of one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other" (142). Furthermore, Woolf discourages women from engaging in any activities that promote racial oppression, not, I would say, because she has over identified with the raced other, but because she perceives their common enemy as a formidable one. Faulting the British woman for her complicity in imperialism, Woolf explains that she desires Empire (which meant an unconscious desire for war), because it provides an outlet for "her unconscious loathing for the education of the private house with its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity" (39), all characteristics we might equally ascribe to the workings of Empire which functioned, in many ways, as a macrocosm of the private house. In defining imperialism as patriarchal, Woolf seeks to reconstruct feminist individualism as resistant to, but also separate from this "male procession" of domination.

In her essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Spivak situates feminist individualism within the context of nineteenth-century Victorianism to expose the two myths of "Victorian morality": "sexual reproduction cathected as 'compassionate love,' and the imperialist project cathected as 'civil-society-through-social-mission'" (263). Woolf's anti-imperialist writings struggle to assert a female

individualism outside the constraints of Victorian "morality," in which women signified "compassionate love" and "civility"; yet her concern for female individualism remains decidedly Eurocentric. In her critiques of empire, Woolf does not escape "reproducing the axioms of imperialism," a task perhaps impossible within an imperialist context, but she does expose the illusions of Empire and the illusory powers it confers upon British women: in To the Lighthouse, which depicts the tyranny of the "private house" of the Ramsay family against the disjunctive disunity of the First World War; in The Waves, which contrasts the destiny of Empire with the effacement of the individual; and especially in Between the Acts which reads as a deconstruction of Empire, and, between the lines, a deconstruction of the private house of feminist oppression.

Mirrors of Subjectivity and Representation

Woolf's obsessive allusions to mirrors and mirroring surfaces within these works signify the fracturing mirror of imperialism. In effect, imperialism fragments the Western female "self" who seeks definition within the limiting surfaces of a patriarchal "mirror" which fails to reflect a feminist reality. Mirrors and mirroring surfaces function as an overdetermined trope representing the illusion of a unified Empire, the surface structure of patriarchy with its lack of nobler depths, the fracture of feminist subjectivity, and so on. The imperialist mirror has ceased to reflect individual identity, much as art, the "mirror of the soul," must deploy other than mimetic devices to express multiplicitous human experiences, particularly women's experiences. On another level, the mirror also points to the self-consciousness of modernist literary forms which, in Said's words, "seem almost quaintly abstract, desperately Eurocentric today" (Culture

330). Given the historical context of these works, the mirrors signify not only the narcissism of such self-conscious production, but also the specular enactment of power relations: the narcissism of the dominator to consolidate the other as a negative specular image of the self, and the "narcissism" of the oppressed who continually seeks a self, even as this image is repeatedly effaced by the reassertion of imperialist structures.

Spivak similarly invokes the myth of Narcissus to explain how the self/other mirroring is fractured so that the British colonialist can see the othered self in the native, but the native can no longer be "selfed" ("Three Women's Texts" 250). While Spivak deals primarily with "native" representations within Victorian texts, Woolf focuses on her white female characters inability to "be selfed." Woolf's construction of feminist subjectivity is further problematized by her modernist sensibilities: her female characters seek feminist individualism at the same time as they recognize the fragmentation and effacement of the self. However, this concern with Western female individualism reproduces its own forms of narcissism, which cannot and do not account for "other" women.

In examining the relationship between Woolf's feminism and anti-imperialism through her references to mirroring--subjectivity and representation,--I am arguing for a postcolonialist reading of Woolf's work which would reconcile materialist concerns with postmodern textual strategies. In her recent essay , "Pathologies: The Virginia Woolf Soap Operas," Jane Marcus critiques postmodernist, postfeminist readings of Woolf which ignore "the historical, the material, the sense of the politically engaged feminist and socialist who is writing to change the world as well as to save her soul (or mind) " (814). One such limited interpretation of Woolf is Pamela Caughie's Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism, which exemplifies

the tendency of postmodernist readings that occur in a socio-historical void to strip literature of its political significance, except that which can be gleaned from the virtues of discontinuity and indeterminacy. In her analysis, Caughie confuses the indeterminacies within Woolf's textual strategies with Woolf's own political positioning, claiming that Woolf was "continuously changing position," and reading Woolf herself as "passionately uncommitted to any one position" (116). This confusion of *strategies* with *political positioning*² obscures Woolf's consistent commitment to feminist, socialist politics and *against* tyranny, patriarchy, and oppression, and serves to further de-politicize Woolf's work.³ While Woolf's artistic strategies may be described as non-imperialist or non-hierarchical in their modes of representation, her politics, although often limited by her Western bourgeois perspective, are committedly anti-imperialist.

The historical context of Woolf's novels that I examine--To The Lighthouse , The Waves, and Between the Acts--is that period between World War I and World War II, and the early years of the Second World War. Woolf herself experienced despair, paralysis and a sense of meaninglessness as a result of the post World War I condition (Benstock 29). The war, it seemed, exacerbated women's marginalization, and Woolf's own "emergent consciousness of marginalism as a woman" may have lead to her psychological collapse (Benstock 31). The onset of World War II stirred unsettling memories of loss and fear in Woolf, and it is within this context that she produced these three anti-imperialist texts. Within these novels, Woolf's numerous references to water in its many forms and various movements signify an ever-fluctuating mirror, an "unsubstantial territory" (Waves 16) of identity, which serves to counter the territorial acquisitions

of empire with its fixed order and borders between individuals and countries. The reflective surface of water with its penetrable depths provides an alternate mirror, one that stresses fluid identities, symbolic of representational strategies counter to the warring essences of empire.

Throughout these texts, Woolf "fictionalizes" her "quarrel with patriarchy and imperialism" (Beer 266) expressed in Three Guineas, which argues that women's opposition to imperialism with its war mentality must take place outside the masculinist "procession" of resistance. Woolf explains how women are positioned outside imperialist structures: because they do not benefit from the "freedom's" war is purported to achieve and maintain, they do not experience similar patriotic loyalties, or nationalistic sentiment. When women discard such "unreal loyalties" (82), they may restructure culture so that it may operate from a point of disinterest to preserve the world from ruin (87). It is, however, doubtful that "culture" can actually be politically disinterested, and when it claims to be so, its interest usually lies in preserving the *status quo*. Yet in exposing the interests of imperialism and its cultural formations, Woolf acknowledges women's complicity in maintaining these hierarchies through the "ingrained belief in intellectual superiority of her own country over other countries" (108). This belief, she argues is merely indoctrination and would dissolve when a woman avows "as a woman, I have no country. As a women I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world" (109). Woolf counters the imperialistic impulse toward claim to territory and a consolidated self with this feminist model of universal nomadism.

Certainly, Woolf speaks here from a position of privilege; because she, unlike many third world women, does have a country, she may easily relinquish it and the country's baggage of a consolidated identity for some

"unsubstantial territory" that demands no false loyalties. Woolf advocates a female identity freed from national, religious, and familial territories, thereby throwing into question traditional constructs of human identity by exposing the repressions and limitations in these ways of identifying, particularly for women. However, for many third world women, nation, religion, and family have often served to counter the oppressions of Western imperialism. Given these contradictions, it is clear that Woolf's anti-imperialist feminism works best when applied to her intended audience, Western bourgeois women.⁴

Unmaking Patriarchy in To the Lighthouse

In To the Lighthouse (1927), written in the aftermath of the First World War, we see the incipient formation of Woolf's anti-imperialist theories that dominate her later works. Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe represent a traditional and modernist struggle, respectively, for female identity within a patriarchal system which interpellates women as supporters of the imperialist project. Like Isobel Burton whose regimen of self-sacrifice supported her husband's adventures and exploits, the traditional role is to encourage "heroism" in order to attain economic security in a system which provides no other options, particularly to women of Mrs. Ramsay's generation. Although women are excluded from the machinery and motivation of colonization and war, Mrs. Ramsay is implicated in this system by her protection of patriarchy and thereby, of imperialism: "Indeed, she had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance . . . " (13). In effect, the protection of the male sex includes protection of those

masculine values which support empire: chivalry, valour, dominance of others. Yet Mrs. Ramsay's daughters question their mother's complicity within this structure: "for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire" (14). Mrs. Ramsay unquestioning collaboration grants her her own imperious position as "Queen" of the Isle; she, like the fisherman's wife of the fairy tale might be "King" were the position open to her. However, caught within this limiting structure of power which ultimately reduces her to the poverty of the female condition, she exhausts her identity on the men around her, so that her very being is sacrificed to imperialist values.

In her essay, "Unmaking and Making in To The Lighthouse," Spivak offers a polemic reading of the novel as "a project to catch the essence of Mrs. Ramsay" with Mr. Ramsay functioning as "philosopher-theorist", Lily as "artist-practitioner" and Mrs. Ramsay as "text" (30). For the artist, Mrs. Ramsay's elusive essence can only be captured on Lily's canvas in abstract form. By positioning Mrs. Ramsay as "text" in relation to imperialism, I wish to foreground the historical and material conditions of the "text's" production. In this context, Lily Briscoe's art (and Woolf's as well) may be read as resistant to the limitations both of artistic production and female subjectivity under the British Empire.

Mr. Ramsay as philosopher-theorist exemplifies imperialist logic as he struggles to get from A to Z in the "proper" linear fashion. Following the logic of Carlyle, he posits that the progress of civilization depends on great men and "requires the existence of a slave class" (67). He considers "the liftman in the Tube . . . an eternal necessity" even though "the thought [is] distasteful to him" (67). He fails, however, to draw a connection between this "slave class" and the position of the women around him, namely his

wife and daughters (although his sons are also subjugated by his tyranny). To avoid the discomfort and hypocrisy of this master/slave hierarchy, Mr. Ramsay turns his attention to the predominance of art, to find "some way of snubbing [it]" (67). He sees art as "merely decoration imposed on top of human life" (67), not an expression of life. It is not surprising that Ramsay's support of the slave class should be linked associatively with his denial of art's function and power, for throughout To the Lighthouse we see the insistence on the predominance of art, in various acts of creation, and its ability to subvert the power structures of imperialist logic. The success of Mr. Carmichael's volume of poetry is attributed to the war which "had revived people's interest in poetry" (202). And To the Lighthouse itself represents the act of creative representation in the face of the seeming meaninglessness of death and war.

The First World War interrupts the rhythm of To the Lighthouse, and pervades the story with insidious insistence, even in those innocent moments when James sits "on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores" (9). The soothing rhythm of domesticity is, in actuality, the crooning of custom which veils ruin (49), be it the ruin of war or of patriarchy. However, this soothing rhythm echoes the rhythm of Woolf's prose which, in its aesthetics of impressionism, tends to deflect the political content of her work. This rhythm, however, is broken both in the "Time Passes" section with the interruption of the war, and by Mr. Ramsay, the embodiment of tyranny, who "permeated, . . . prevailed, . . . imposed himself . . . changed everything" (223).

To the Lighthouse moves between various modes of human consciousness, as its narrative is encompassed by a creative consciousness

that attempts to redeem even the imperialist mind. The "Time Passes" section alternates between a narrative "empty of any human presence" (Miller 179) and the consciousness of the "slave class" as "an eternal necessity" represented by the housekeeper, Mrs. McNab. Although language is hardly possible without human consciousness, Woolf's experiment with such a language creates a narrative distance that *liquefies* those boundaries that divide one thing or being from another: "One can hardly tell which is the sea and which is the land" (189). Human consciousness creates boundaries of separation, yet a world without such distinctions is far from utopian. It is, rather, an "immense darkness" (189), "a joke with nothingness" (190), a looking-glass without a face (194), an image "robbed of meaning" (196). This section, however, is not entirely rid of human consciousness, but rather filters through the consciousness of the "slave class" in Mrs. McNab whose actions appear meaningless without a master to serve. Mrs. McNab is a dim reflection of the absent Mrs. Ramsay, who had literally worked herself to death with the cares of her family. The housekeeper insists, "It was too much for one woman, too much, too much . . . It was beyond the strength of one women" (206-07), even as she herself endures with time. The bracketing of "political" events--marriage, death, war--within the section further rids the context of its meaning, and reinforces Mrs. McNab's problematic positioning and distance from the family as a member of the working class.

Lily Briscoe resists both her position within patriarchal structures and traditional modes of representation within her art which insists that even against "the fields of death," "the vision must be perpetually remade" (270). Through Lily, Woolf seems to be experimenting with an artistic consciousness that is non-imperialistic, non-hierarchical, because in her

art, as through Woolf's narrative style and contents, the determinate boundary between subject and object, artist and subject is *liquefied* in the very act of representation. The lighthouse is "a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye". . . "the tower stark and straight" (276), or even the centered line that completes Lily Briscoe's painting, "For nothing was merely one thing" (277). In the first two sections of the novel, the window through which Mrs. Ramsay both looks and is seen is replaced by the cracked mirror of the war, which fixes fragmented images within time. Yet, in "The Lighthouse" section, Lily's vision offers a unifying "moment of presence" (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 151) which recenters those individualized islands of consciousness in a moment that liquefies the divisions between people with the stroke of a brush/pen. However, the political efficacy of such seemingly indulgent abstractions to, in Marcus' words, "change the world" remains questionable.

Lily's creation does confound not only the mimetic power of art, but also the illusions of empire as portrayed within realistic art forms, and embodied in Mr. Ramsay's tyranny. Lily's struggle toward a unified vision to counter the illusion of a unified Empire fragments the surface structures of patriarchy:

Did she complete what he [Ramsay] began? With equal complacency she saw his misery, his meanness, and his torture. That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? . . . the mirror was broken. (202)

Lily Briscoe discovers in her walk along the beach that the beauty outside no longer mirrors the beauty within (201), that the image in the looking-glass is now "robbed of meaning" (196), that the war has in fact exposed the illusion of this glassy surface which had formed in quiescence, particularly in women's complicity in imperialism, at the cost of those "nobler powers [which] sleep beneath." The mirror offers only a two-dimensional surface, one that has lost its power of mimesis. It is only in fracturing the mirror, in penetrating its surfaces, or in creating a mirror not of glass, but of moving water, that women may break from the illusory "harmony" of the Ramsay household, and of imperialism, which is in fact a tyranny.

Unsubstantial Territories of Identity in The Waves

This struggle for artistic creation in the context of imperialist human destiny is played out more specifically as the struggle for individual identity in Woolf's 1931 novel The Waves. The action takes place in that unsubstantial territory of the characters' minds, on the boundary between land and sea where the waves rhythmically roll and crash, each character merging with the others thoughts. Unlike To The Lighthouse and Between the Acts, the novel's focus is not primarily on women, yet its consciousness is feminist, even as it confronts assumptions of hierarchy through its male protagonist, Bernard. As he sits among his friends early in the novel, Bernard thinks, "when we sit together, close, we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make *an unsubstantial territory*" (16, my emphasis). Like the waves, identities merge then recede into extreme isolation; "in fact the basic structure of The Waves is a series of recurring cycles in each of which identity is lost and regained" (Hulcoop 476). The ocean or "looking-glass" functions as a mirror which attends both the real and the phantom

reflection, both of which are "inextricably involved" (*Waves* 75). Woolf suggests that these mirrors which create phantom reflections are part of the-thing-itself, with its undulating, turbulent presence. By drawing attention to the very nature of the mirroring surfaces, Woolf creates an alternate narcissism which emphasizes the interconnectedness of self/other, real/phantom relationships:

The real flower on the window-sill was attended by a phantom flower. Yet the phantom was part of the flower for when a bud broke free, the paler flower in the glass opened a bud too. (75)

The scene mirroring the phantom flower is followed by Bernard's associations on "the complexity of things," particularly on his own multiple selves, the "different men who alternately act their parts as Bernard" (76). The characters reflect themselves against one another's monologues, forming a polyvocal text of fluid identities, wherein self/other mirroring occurs not only intersubjectively, but also within the individuals themselves. In this sense, the novel may be read as a document of Western individualism engaged in self-conscious interrogation of its own mechanisms.

The waves, however, alternate between the calm dispersion of identity *and* imperialistic power itself, as they drum upon the shore "like turbaned warriors, like turbaned men with poisoned assegais who, whirling their arms on high advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep" (75). These warriors in their Eastern garb may signify a deathly resistance, much like the rhythmic movement of the waves, to the categorical imperative of British imperialism. The ocean, at one moment mirroring the phantom images of flowers, at the next turbaned warriors, is a mirror of "the world ransacked to its uttermost ends, and all its heights stripped and gathered of

their flowers" (178), and is inextricable from that world's beauty and destruction.

The streaming consciousness of the novel's action eddies around the absent character of Percival, gone off to India to serve British colonialism. Percival's empty place at the center of the novel reflects the decentering of imperialism's traditional agent and hero⁵:

Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet.

By applying the standards of the West, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved. He rides on; the multitude cluster round him, regarding him as if he were--what indeed he is--a God (136).

At least this is Percival as Bernard imagines him in his military splendor, solving the problems of the East using Western standards and violent language. Percival, as the absent hero who falls from his horse, never represents himself; rather he becomes an emblem signifying the fetishized fallen God of imperialism. Rhoda describes him as "like a stone fallen into a pond round which minnows swarm" (136). And Louis, the Australian colonial, describes Percival as the one "who makes us aware that these attempts to say, 'I am this, I am that' . . . are false" (137). In contrast to Bernard who consolidates Percival's identity as the master of empire, Louis sees in the very emblems of empire their own deconstruction, exposing the human tendency to assert a separate identity by accentuating differences as dangerous illusion:

We have tried to accentuate differences. From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is

particular to us. But there is a chain whirling round, round,
in a steel-blue circle beneath. (137)

Bernard later recognizes the absurdity of those distinctions of imperialist logic which reify differences in order to assert power over others. He describes kings as people with teapots on their heads who claim "I am a King!" "It is a trick of the mind," he continues, "to put Kings on their thrones, one following an, with crowns on their head" (227). Percival's heroism becomes another trick of imperialism, which as Woolf explains in her essays "not only licensed, but glorified" childish activities "pursued in the service of Empire" (Vol. 3, 240).

The artifice of this heroism is contrasted to the characters of Rhoda and Louis, whom Bernard describes as "the authentics" because they "exist most completely in solitude. They resent illumination and reduplication" (116). Resisting these narcissistic impulses, "the authentics" are quite unlike Bernard who requires an audience to mirror his image back to himself, because without the mirror he has no self. Yet, Rhoda in particular struggles with the absence of her own reduplicated image. When she sees her face in the looking-glass, she tries to avoid it, asserting repeatedly "I have no face" (43, 223). Ironically, Neville sees Rhoda's face, "reflected mistily in the looking-glass" and thinks, "She looks far away over our heads, beyond India" (138-9). Yet Rhoda's effacement creates in her a madness. Looking "beyond India," refusing to be mirrored within an imperialist frame, finding no mirror sufficient for identity save the ever-fluctuating sea, Rhoda chooses Woolf's own chosen end, dissolution of the self within the waves. Her demise, however, can be attributed to her relationship with Louis; as unlikely lovers, their alliance signifies that of the British woman to imperialism. Rhoda's madness is the opposite of Louis, who sits "wild-eyed

but severe, in his attic, in his office [forming] unalterable conclusions upon the true nature of what is to be known" (218). With the loss of his lover, Rhoda, Louis turns into that very emblem of imperialist authority that she defied; yet Louis clings to the space in his attic as a place where he can be himself, divested of this authority, which he perceives as the burden of his destiny:

The maps of our successful undertakings confront us on the wall. We have laced the world together with our ships. The globe is strung with our lines . . . As a boy I dreamt of the Nile, was reluctant to awake, yet brought down my fist on the grained oak door. It would have been happier to have been born without a destiny. . . (200-201).

These passages suggest that to resist reduplication by refusing the social mirroring of otherness--that phantom of the self and those others whose identities confront their own,--creates either the madness of extreme abstraction (Rhoda) or the madness of imperialist destiny (Louis). Both Rhoda and Louis recognize what Bernard describes as "our perpetual illusion," "the true order of things" (271); yet, Louis, as a man, can accept his role in this illusion, whereas Rhoda cannot, and thus her suicide. The Waves, in effect, inverts the outcome of the battle between artistic creation and resistant feminist subjectivity, embodied in Lily Briscoe and Rhoda, and patriarchy or imperialism, embodied in Mr. Ramsay and Louis. Louis, unlike Ramsay, is self-aware of his own tyranny and uncomfortably straddles his two lives; whereas Rhoda resists such duplicity in her act of suicide, an act to absolve the self of complicity in an imperialist system where there is no absolution.

Between the Acts: A Final Act of Subversion

Woolf's own final narrative performance, Between the Acts, implicates us all in the perpetuation of imperialism by deploying the theatrical metaphor to assert that "We all act." In "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism," Homi K. Bhabha describes the "triumphal art of Empire," an empire which operates and sustains itself through the art of illusions, the play of mirrors in self/other relations. Bhabha invokes Fanon's theatrical metaphor for the colonial struggle, "the scene-which emphasizes the visible--the seen."⁶ Woolf's use of the theatrical metaphor in Between the Acts exposes the unseen in a society so intent on maintaining appearances. In a bold act of subversion, Miss La Trobe, the play's director, makes the audience the "actors" of the final scene through the absence of action on stage and a clever play of mirrors--an act which unsettles social constructions and turns the spectators with their voyeuristic power into the objects of their own aggression. This alienation breaks the audience's immersion in the theatrical illusion, and is experienced as a threatening self-awareness, especially of their own "incivility."

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Bhabha's theory explains the relationship between narcissism and the aggressivity of fetishism which plays between the affirmation of wholeness or similarity and the recognition of difference and its disavowal ("The Other Question" 162). In Between the Acts, the narcissistic moment is subverted, forcing the audience to recognize their own savagery, their own perceived lack. The mirror then, as what Bhabha terms the "alienating other" returns the image to the subject, at a moment, in this case when the subject had not assumed his or her role in the acting, is ill-prepared for self-reflection,

caught off guard rather than in the Imaginary, which sustains the illusions of self-contained wholeness and racial (or sexual) stereotypes. The unsettling final scene/seen throws into question the history of British Empire with its stereotypical modes of representation and their relation to notions of national and sexual identity.

Between the Acts opens on "a summer's night and they were talking, in the big room with the windows open to the garden, about the cesspool" (3). The plans for this cesspool are articulated by "Mr. Oliver, of the Indian Civil Service" who explains "

the site they had chosen for the cesspool was, if he had heard aright, on the Roman road. From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabeth manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars. (5)

This historical regression marking the scars of various empires upon the land culminates in a cesspool, the symbolic center of moral and political corruption. The informant is himself an agent of corruption and dominance, portrayed in the his treatment of the Afghan hound Sohrab over which he asserts his enfeebled power: "It was impressive to the nurses, the way an old boy of his age could still bawl and make a brute like that obey him" (12). The old man loses himself in reveries of his colonial power, as his mastery over the dog parallels his dominance over the "savages" of India in his youth: "The master was not dead, only dreaming; drowsily, seeing as in a glass, its lustre spotted, himself, a young man helmeted; and a cascade falling. But no water . . . and in the shadow of the rock, savages; and in his hand a gun" (17). When Isa walks in, interrupting his dream she is "destroying youth and India" (180). Her own loathing of

the domestic parallels Sohrab's denial of the ties of domesticity, a refusal that interrupts the reveries of empire embodied in the old man. The old man's glories are mirrored now in the spotted lustre of the glass, or worse, in a cesspool built upon the ruinous scars of empire.

The savagery of empire is highlighted by the story Isa reads in the paper of the troopers coercing a girl to look at a horse that supposedly had a green tail. When the girl discovers it's just an ordinary horse, they take her up to the barracks and gang-rape her (20). The invention of a horse with a green tail points to the coercive lies of imperialism which entrap women in abusive situations. Isa, restless with her marriage, holds to another fabrication, that "cliché conveniently provided by fiction". . . "The father of my children" (14). Herself a character trapped within a bad script, she uses this phrase as a means of recentering herself, as she gazes into the mirror, contemplating her feelings for the gentleman farmer, and their encounter of the previous night--"she groped into the depths of the looking-glass, for a word to fit . . ." (15). The cliché comes easily to her lips, but the words for her feelings remain within the impenetrable surface of the mirror. The question that persists throughout the novel is the nature of mirrors, and of art, more specifically, art as a "mirror of the soul . . . In this case a tarnished, a spotted soul" (16). The problem is that mirrors expose, not only the sublimity of the soul, but also its boredom, so that "Nobody could pretend . . . that the looking-glass always reflected the anguish of a Queen or the heroism of King Harry" (16), that admittedly the glories of empire are perhaps an illusion of mirrors through which, as in books and worn clichés of fiction, one seeks a soul.

This search leads Isa, as well as the other players acting between the acts, to an awareness of their own savagery. Isa contemplates a time "When

we were savages" (30), when there was no sea between England and the continent, a time when savages had performed skillful operations on the brain, when Pharaohs had invented false teeth, as her dentist had told her. Her understanding of savagery is not "the horror" of Conrad's Heart of Darkness, but rather a freedom "before the Conquest," not a backward savagery, but a state of liberation and advancement that precedes the cesspool of imperialism.

In many modernist works, as in nineteenth-century travel narratives, "the native" came to represent a savage freedom from the constraints of culture, even though the "native" was bound by the same oppressive system of colonial authority as women of the private house. Although Woolf does not deal directly with "the native" in her works, she does deploy the character of colonials as persons situated outside the constraints of patriarchal culture; their agency resultant from their questionable ancestry and their emergence from "uninhabitable" territory. The colonial, not entirely culturally "other," inhabits this borderland between otherness and sameness, and serves as "the moment of presence" (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 151) for Woolf, in a context where female presence is constantly being effaced and denied. This moment of identification is, however, problematic in ways that Woolf fails to interrogate. The female colonial becomes the representative inhabitant of a "region" that lies outside the constraints of culture. For Woolf, the colonial with her native connection, comes to occupy the native's role as, what Spivak calls, "the object of. . . the *terrorism of the categorical imperative*" ("Three Women's Texts" 267). By using the female colonial, who is both object and agent of empire, to represent this "moment of presence" for women's identity, Woolf ignores her complicity with

imperialism. Unlike the male colonial, such as Louis in The Waves, who is absolutely implicated in the workings of empire, the female colonial, by virtue of her gender, seems to escape this complicity.

Isa's concept of savagery is embodied in the colonial, Mrs. Manresa, who threatens Isa's family stability by flirting with her husband, Giles. Mrs. Manresa had "complete faith in flesh and blood," and yet she appears a woman of surfaces without a life history. Her birthplace, according to gossip, was Tasmania where her father had been exported for some "mid-Victorian scandal," a colony where "they forgot and forgave very easily" (40). Her jewels were dug by an earlier "husband's" hands, and her present husband is a Jew, a fact included, it seems, merely to reinforce her otherness. Her colonial vulgarity is nonetheless welcome among this proper crowd:

Vulgar she was in her gestures, in her whole person, over-sexed, over-dressed for a picnic. But what a desirable, at least valuable, quality it was--for everybody felt, directly she spoke, "She's said it, she's done it, not I," and could take advantage of the breach of decorum of the fresh air that blew in, to follow like leaping dolphins in the wake of an ice-breaking vessel. (41)

Mrs. Manresa's breach of decorum, in particular the expression of her sexuality, a vulgar sexuality often associated with "primitive" territories, allows a more relaxed air into the room. Her sexual ease, however, is seen as an act by the other women from whom she veils her eyes conspiratorially. "Her claim to be a wild child of nature," her socially inappropriate behavior, not only stirs up the guests, but also "challenges London" (42), the political center of empire. Isa perceives Mrs. Manresa, with her

wholehearted laugh, throwing off convention as she loosens the stays on her garter to roll in the grass, as "quite genuine" (42), and sets Mrs. Manresa up as a mirror, or as vestibular to her freedom from the clichés of fiction pervasive in her own life.

When Miss La Trobe finally performs her mirror trick, and the audience shifts in their seats,—"all evaded or shaded themselves"--Mrs. Manresa alone responds naturally: "facing herself in the glass, used it as a glass" (186). She uses the mirror unself-consciously, not only to view herself, but to openly remake her make-up as she would in the bathroom mirror. The colonial, in this instance, operates as "the moment of presence," as the rest of the audience effaces (shadows) itself: "Alone she preserved her identity, and faced without blinking herself. Calmly she reddened her lips" (186). The climactic moment in a system of *differance*, is this moment when difference may be represented as presence; as Mrs. Manresa is difference, so she can be represented; however, the audience is confronted with their own difference and lack projected onto them through the play of mirrors,--a "malignant indignity" (186) they say, discomfited. Their reactions range from denial, to resistance, refusing to play the part, or better, refusing to acknowledge the part they play within the history of Empire. This moment of decentering is captured by the voice which speaks to the restless crowd:

*Before we part, ladies and gentlemen, before we go . . .
 . let's talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing
 or cant. Let's break the rhythm and forget the rhyme. And
 calmly consider ourselves. Ourselves. Some bony. Some fat
 (the glasses confirmed this.) Liars most of us. Thieves too.
 (The glasses made no comment on that). . . A tyrant*

remember is half a slave. . . O we're all the same. . . Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilisation to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?

At the end of this monologue, the narrative voice questions, "Was that voice ourselves" (189)? Woolf asserts that in surface differences there is a sameness within and among these "selves," thereby confronting the assumptions of "civilisation." What the audience experiences at this moment is not, what Spivak terms, "the consolidation of the imperialist self" ("Three Women's Texts" 272), but rather its fragmentation. Mrs. Manresa, the wild child of colonialism, is in some sense consolidated, but not as absolutely other; she appears rather as a form of consolidated differentials, for although we don't get a clear picture of her looking in the mirror, she does see herself, she does have presence to herself.

What, then are the implications of this fragmentation of the imperialist self for the British women in the text, specifically for Isa? By framing the domestic drama within the imperialist drama, and vice versa, Between the Acts reveals how the oppressive structures of the private house connect with the imperialist plan. The play enacted at the town festival provides the audience with the history of British Empire, even as planes fly overhead head, threatening invasion (Beer 287). Miss La Trobe's production contextualized within this threat of war questions the very cliché of 'Home Sweet Home,' and the assumptions of the civilizing mission with its claims "To convert the heathen!" "To help our fellow men!" (172). Home, both the private house and "Victoria's land," guards its "respectability, and prosperity and . . . purity" (172); however, the play brings Isa to the awareness that

there is something "'unhygenic' about the home" (174), an allusion which draws us back to the cesspool of imperialism. This Home/home relationship echoes through the refrain of the play, a nursery rhyme that reinforces the workings of imperialism, what Woolf describes in Three Guineas as an infantile fixation:

The King is in his counting house

Counting out his money,

The Queen is in her parlour

Eating . . .

This rhyme--which attributes all economic power to the King who counts out his money, while his wife is completely dependent upon the monarch for her food, even as she indulges herself--points to both imperialism and capitalism as methods of controlling women. At the same time, it is not merely women who are fixed, trapped in this state of dependency, but rather, as Miss La Trobe's mirroring reveals, "They were all caught and caged; prisoners; watching a spectacle" (179), trapped within this spectacle of Empire which had, at the time of Woolf's writing, enacted another world war.

Within this system of imperialist mirrors and fixed images, Isa is trying to come to terms with her own resistance to domesticity and her own self-effacement. Interestingly, Isa's sister-in-law, Mrs. Swithin, an older woman prone to long flights of memory, recalls her mother who rebukes her for staring at herself in the mirror (9). When Isa later gapes at herself in a three-folded mirror "so that she can see three separate versions of her rather heavy, yet handsome, face" (13), she muses on love. The fragmentation of her subjectivity is evident even here; and later, during the play when the children hold up the mirrors, Isa sees a child holding her own mother's cracked mirror. These two passages suggest that what women have

inherited from their mothers is a fragmented understanding of self, for even as they give their daughters a cracked mirror with which to view themselves, they at the same time reprimand them for looking in the glass. Only Mrs. Manresa "preserved unashamed her identity" (186) as she looks at herself in the mirror; she is even applauded for this gesture.

Yet why should this mirror which Isa first perceives as "so distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair" succeed in dissolving the "barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute" (184)? Why should this lead Isa to the admit "we all are savages still" (199)? For Woolf, the savage is no longer associated with a particular group of others, but rather signifies a territory of existence outside the "civility" of Empire and its theatrical illusions. The text itself questions whether if we are still left with questions is the play a success, or not. Miss La Trobe's struggle as author and "slave to [her] audience" (211) produces multiple meanings, for each spectator sees something different in the play. The novel, however, moves us again into Mrs. Swithin's outline of history, back to the swamps of prehistoric "man," and the house recedes to a cave dwelling where Isa and Giles will fight like savages, then embrace. For it is also in this "heart of darkness, in the field of night" where conventions of "civilisation" are lost, for there are no mirrors to reflect them. The savage has no referent outside the swamps or this house; there is only that savage that we ourselves efface within our own gaze.

This ambivalence toward "savagery," played out in the imperialist drama as "the disavowal of difference" (Bhabha) conjures the scene for Miss La Trobe's next play, as words rise out of the mud and the artist sits "arms akimbo with her glass before her" (212). Miss La Trobe hears the first words, as the curtain rises on Isa and Giles' lovemaking, which takes us back to a time when "England was . . . a swamp" (218); for as her previous play

deconstructed the workings of Empire, Miss La Trobe's next play promises a context freed from the constraints of imperialism, a maternal rather than paternal order.⁷ Though Woolf herself did not live through the Second World War, her final performance in Between the Acts asserts that the savage does not exist beyond the surface of the mirror, but rather within imperialism itself, and that only the dissolution of empire will ensure the perpetuation of culture and human life.

Contemporary Uses of Woolf

By way of conclusion, I would like to extend this examination of Woolf's anti-imperialist texts to consider further how her feminist writings have been taken up in the 1990's, particularly by Western feminists advocating an internationalist feminist movement. For example, the first edition of the new Ms. Magazine of the 1990's, freed from capitalist control of paid advertisements, pictured a collage of women from around the world with Woolf's statement from Three Guineas, "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world" (109). As I mentioned earlier, this claim, particularly when used to disparage third world women involved in nationalist struggles against Western domination, simply fails to recognize the privilege of Western women in having a country to cast off. For within the continued imperialist structures of the late twentieth-century, nationalism, although still a problematic ideology, has meant for many colonized women the struggle for the right of self-determination. Woolf does, however, recognize how Western women are implicated in structures of domination in their service to imperialist projects and in their attitudes of superiority toward third world women, which arise from confusing privilege with superiority. At times, Woolf's writing belies

her own privilege, and yet these oversights hardly discredit her commitment to egalitarian social relations. While Woolf's strategies for feminist subjectivity may be viable for Western bourgeois feminists whose affiliations with nation, religion and family place them in a dominant position, many third world women whose cultural identities have been effaced along with their female identities, may not experience these affiliations necessarily as "false loyalties." In fact, in chapters five through ten, I examine how family, nation, and religion have served as grounds of resistance for third world women. While the revival of Woolf's anti-imperialist writings in the interest of international feminism reveals not only the fluidity and complexity of her own artistic strategies, but also the propensity of her vision to be "perpetually remade" (Lighthouse 270); we must ask, in whose image?

What then is the relationship between Woolf's anti-imperialist feminism which spurred early twentieth-century debates on these issues and that put forth by third world women at the *fin de siècle*? Jane Marcus describes both Woolf and third world women as feminist representations of the avant-garde, in the 1970's and 1990's, respectively, and explains how Woolf's position as such limited the readings of her life and work:

Both the ascribed romance and pathology of [Woolf's] lesbianism . . . figured as a paradigm of deviance/madness for lesbian-feminist politics and sexuality before the figure of the lesbian as the avant-garde of feminism was replaced by the figure of the black woman and now by the Third World woman ("Pathologies" 807).

Marcus' ironic comment suggests not only the "romance and pathology" inherent in determining the "avant-garde," but also the tendency of avante-

garde movements to reduce the readings of "fashionable" writers' works to those characteristics and themes that led to their popularization within a particular historical moment. In rereading Woolf within a postcolonial context, we find that both Woolf and third world women have something to say not only to each other, but also to the existing tensions between and among feminists who are working to rid the feminist movement of its own imperialist tendencies.

Notes to Chapter 2: Feminist Anti-Imperialism in Virginia Woolf's Texts

¹Here, I borrow from Jenny Sharpe who argues that "as feminists, we should not similarly efface European women's agency by constructing them as victims of colonial relations that are patriarchal alone." See "The Unspeakable Limits of Rape," 36.

²In "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," Chela Sandoval explains how U.S. Third World feminists employ a strategy of "differential consciousness" which requires both "commitment to egalitarian social relations" and flexibility of tactical positions in opposing dominant ideologies (15). Woolf's writing, I would argue, embodies some form of differential consciousness in its committed politics and fluctuating textual strategies.

³Caughie attempts to "free Woolf's writings from the cage of modernism and the camps of feminism." In her chapter on Woolf's nonfictional prose, Caughie acknowledges that her approach is open to "charges that it neglects social, political, economic, sexual relations--in its attention to language theory and textual strategies" (113); yet Caughie's attempts to correct this problem by exploring the relationship between Woolf's rhetorical styles and material circumstances only in Woolf's nonfictional works, dismisses the material circumstances and contexts of Woolf's fiction. In analysing Woolf's artist figures, Caughie fails to position them within the historical moment of their production (as she fails to do with Woolf herself), or to connect Woolf's attention to the illusions of art with its power to expose and deconstruct the artful illusions of the British Empire.

⁴In *Three Guineas*, Woolf claims to be writing specifically about middle-class, educated, British women and their relationship to imperialism. I take this to apply to her fictional works as well.

⁵See Makiko Minnow-Pinkney's psychoanalytic reading of Percival as "the center of the novel that's now emptied," and Louis as "an efficient agent of imperialist capitalism [who] necessarily embodies the hated 'masculine' ego" (178, 85). *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Rutgers UP, 1987).

⁶Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question," 163. According to Fanon, what was seen of the "native" primarily was skin color, and this act of spectatorship allowed the viewer to maintain power over the object of his or her gaze.

⁷See Sallie Sears, "Theatre of War: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*" in *Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, ed. Jane Marcus (U of Nebraska Press, 1983). Sears asserts that the novel takes place on a day in June 1939 when Hitler was preparing to invade Poland, an act which signaled to Woolf "the complete ruin both of European civilization and of her own last lap" (213). She reads the "savagery" of this final section as the scene after the ruin of patriarchal civilization.

Chapter 3: Military Presences and Absences: Arab Women and the Persian Gulf War

Looking for the "Nile River," according to the fifteenth century Portuguese notion, is someone's joke. For all that pre-Columbian "explorers" knew about the sciences of navigation and geography, we are surprised that more parties of them did not end up "discovering" Europe. Perhaps, from a certain angle, that is precisely all that they found--an alternative reading of ego.

--Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"

Despite the many changing appearances it has taken through the years, the image of the white colonial savior seems more pernicious than ever since it operates now via consent.

--Trinh T. Minh-ha, When the Moon Waxes Red

In the postmodern era, news media, with their subservience to corporate advertisers and government interests, have come to emulate the disinformation of fashion magazines, popular films, and talk shows, suggesting that the discourses of fashion and politics are not so disparate. U.S. political discourse on the Persian Gulf War created an illusion of consensus to a fashionable war with "picture perfect" bombing assaults that were supposedly "saving" Iraqi lives.¹ The specifically *gendered* representations of demonized Arab men and captive or absent Arab women fed a revival of colonialist attitudes through images that mirrored those of colonial travel writers, and heralded George Bush's new world order to reassert U.S. dominance in the Middle East.

The absent Arab woman has been deployed within the U.S. media both as a resonant and as an efficient signifier of so-called Western cultural superiority over the Arab world. By the *absent Arab woman*, I mean two notable forms of absence: the first, a literal absence, when the Arab woman

is not present or is entirely missing from the scene; the second, a symbolic absence, when she is present but only for the purpose of representing her invisibility or silence in order to serve as a subordinate to the Western subject of the scene. She is also granted moments of presence when her actions and speech are manipulated and exploited to serve the interests of her Western interpreters. In all these instances, the *absent* Arab woman is objectified and contrasted to the "liberated" Western woman, who often serves as a representative for Arab women. The white woman is granted agency to speak for Arab women, usually on behalf of their liberation. In Women and Gender in Islam, Leila Ahmed defines this form of "colonial feminism" as "feminism used against other cultures in the service of colonialism" (151), a "feminism" that is racist in its assumptions and exploitative of both "native" and Western women in its appropriation of feminist language to serve imperialist/patriarchal interests. In the case of the Persian Gulf War, the neocolonialist rhetoric of Western intervention to save Arab women from Arab men mirrored "colonial feminist" strategies in its attempt to discredit Arab culture as universally oppressive to women. The U.S. media's predictions of Saudi women's liberation, exemplified in "Images of 'GI Jane' fuel Saudi Women's advance on tradition" (Chicago Tribune, 19 Sept. 90), juxtaposed U.S. military women in camouflage to Saudi women in their *abayahs*, to depict Arab women as the agents of Western influence. However, in contrast to its anticipated liberatory effect, U.S. military presence in the region did nothing but reinforce the invisibility of Arab women within Saudi Arabian society. In particular, Saudi women were sacrificed by their government for the preservation of a culture that seemed to be deteriorating under the growing threat of Western influence.

This relentless absenting of Arab women, from its most banal forms in U.S. fashion magazines and talk shows to U.S. news reports on the Persian Gulf Crisis and War, I argue, supports the neocolonialist interests of the new world order and the U.S. media's repressions of the war's destruction. The double-invisibility imposed on Arab women not only by the U.S. media/military (which became virtually indistinguishable during the war) and by Arab government leaders, but also by U.S. women and feminists who served as "stand-ins" for absent Arab women, effectively stripped Arab women of agency and disallowed their "illegitimate voices" to be heard, voices which might have disrupted the racist stereotypes of Arabs used to justify U.S. military actions.

The Fashionable Contrast of East and West

The Autumn 1990 catalogue for Tweeds, a mail order fashion company for the young and upwardly mobile, evokes the colonial fantasy of exploring the Nile River in order to exoticize Tweeds fairly staid and conventional yuppie attire. The catalogue cover alludes to Sir Richard Burton's adventures portrayed in the 1990 box office hit Mountains of the Moon. In the center of a "Map of the course of the Nile," a rugged Burtonesque Anglo-American holds a young Egyptian girl in his arms, his "conquest" of her represented by her clothing, because she is dressed in a man's oversized dress shirt and sweater that hang to her feet (see fig. 1). The goal of Tweeds' "less extensive" journey along the Nile is explicit: "We wanted to rediscover our clothing in the context of a different culture" (2). In other words, we in the U.S. discover ourselves, our clothing, against a backdrop of Otherness.²

To make Egypt a viable context for U.S. fashion, the magazine focuses primarily on its exotic colors: "the rose tint of the Pyramids at sunset, the

desert's stark beige, the verdant green of the Nile valley" (2). For a taste of cultural flavor, the second paragraph introduces the phrase "*Inshallah*," which as the catalogue explains, "literally means 'God willing,' but the Egyptians use it so often, it's simply taken to mean 'perhaps,' 'we'll see,' 'who knows?'" (2). Tweeds, in effect, secularizes the term "*Inshallah*" for its U.S. audience. Perhaps it does so because one of the greatest obstacles to rapprochement between the Arab East and the West--a division which is a construct of imperialist ideology--is Islamic religion, which is most often cast by the U.S. media in terms of "Islamic extremists," "*jihad*" or "holy war," presumably against the West. While Tweeds emphasizes the *color* contrast of the landscape, it simultaneously downplays *cultural* contrasts that would upset its constructed colonial fantasy or expose the political tensions and contradictions between the two worlds.

The *color* contrast of Egypt's landscape, against which "splendid things gleam in the dust" (12) points to the racial contrast of its inhabitants, the backdrop of darker peoples against which the colonizer is highlighted. Throughout the catalogue, Arab men and boys form an out-of-focus background for the white U.S. models. The text and the pictures present the reader/consumer with conflicting messages: we are reminded that "Egyptians are naturally courteous, friendly and hard-working people" (57), lest we forget their natural "humanness," because any photographs of Egyptians without Americans are done in black and white, making the Arabs drab in comparison (see fig. 2). Arab women are noticeably absent from the catalogue, except for one woman in a long black dress, who is identified as "lead[ing] a gypsy's life" (60). While the U.S. male models are made to look decidedly Anglo, the U.S. female models are alternately cast in the role of Western colonialist and the role of the exotic, yet absent Egyptian woman,

with straight dark hair hanging down or wrapped in deep-colored scarves. In the opening pages, the U.S. female models appear as the colonialist tourists in pleated skirts and oxford shirts, travelers, as the text suggests, accustomed to the comforts of home: "To Western travellers of half a century ago, staying at one of the venerable colonial hotels scattered along the Nile must have felt like finding an oasis in the middle of the desert"(46). However, in the center section, they form a "centerfold," standing in for the absent Arab women, with bare bellies, sashes around the waist, and lines around the eyes to make them more almond-shaped (40). The final pages restore the U.S. models to colonialist adventuresses, with sunglasses, camera and other desert paraphernalia, standing in the desert sands with camels in the background (see fig. 3).

Though many of the same models are used in all sections, the darkest one appears exclusively in the central section as the exoticized Other. The positioning of the female models suggests Western women's dual role within a colonialist/capitalist structure, casting them alternately in positions of dominance and submission, as agents and objects of imperialism. The U.S. women appropriate the Arab woman's exoticized sensuality as a transforming act that empowers their otherwise repressed sexuality. In these advertisements, the female body "both stands for the 'Other' culture and provides the negation of its Otherness" (Williamson 109).

Another, perhaps more blatant example of commercialized representations of Western and Arab women is exhibited in a Jerry Hall swimwear ad that appeared in the winter of 1989 (see fig. 4). The advertisement depicts Jerry Hall in a red two-piece bathing suit, with bangles on her wrists and a transparent scarf draped over her shoulders, her thinly-clad body highlighted against a backdrop of veiled Arab women.

The text reads, "Jerry Hall's swimwear may have raised a few eyebrows in Morocco. But no one's really sure." Playing on images of concealment and exposure, the advertisement employs cultural contrast to exoticize the white woman and her expressive feminine sensuality. The suggested spectators of Hall's exhibitionism, however, are not men, but the othered, supposedly oppressed and sexually repressed Moroccan women who seem to gaze enviously at the Western woman. The women,--not visible except for their eyes (even their eyebrows are not seen), stare at the camera--they see, but are not seen. Jerry Hall, in contrast, looks away from the camera--the object of the camera's gaze--as she stands towering above the squatting or standing women, one hand on her hip, the other threading its fingers through her long blond hair. In order to stage this cultural contrast, the advertisement blatantly misrepresents Moroccan women, suggesting that all women in Morocco wear the veil, when, in fact, most women in Morocco who attend schools or hold jobs outside the home today are unveiled.³ Even the form of the veil is incorrect,⁴ but most Westerners are not concerned with the subtleties and variations of veiling, rather with veiling as a monolithically oppressive practice. Still the point of the advertisement is clear: Western women are more sexually expressive and liberated. Ironically, the ad reveals how both Western and Arab women are held captive by patriarchal practices which cast them as sexual objects, either fetishized or repressed. Jerry Hall's central position further accentuates the narcissism of Western culture, which pursues "contact" with other cultures merely to find an alternative reading of the self, in this case an exoticized version of the self which fulfills the colonial fantasy.

The Arab woman remains absent from this discourse of fashion, except as a backdrop against which to highlight the Western woman, or in the case

of *Tweeds*, as a little girl cradled in the arms of an Anglo man superimposed on the colonial map. As Gayatri Spivak argues, "To buy a self-contained version of the West" such as that sold by Hall or *Tweeds* "is to ignore its production by the imperialist project" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 291). Replacing British imperialism with U.S. capitalism, these advertisements exploit the imperialist project as a fashionable ideology. This is an ironic comment on Third World/ First World relations under late capitalism, in which the development of multinational corporations based on the economic exploitation of third world peoples mirrors colonialist strategies of exploitation. The Arab East is marketed for the U.S. consumer in this celebration and revival of colonialist ideology. Coincidentally, this ideology merged neatly with tactics used to sell the Persian Gulf War to U.S. audiences.

The Perverse Sexuality/Morality of the Orient

With Saddam Hussein's August second invasion of Kuwait, "Arabia" instantly fell out of fashion, yet the Arab world remained at the center of U.S. media attention. According to mainstream news media which operated in unquestioning synchrony with U.S. government policy, Saddam's "rape" of Kuwait had to be avenged. Even the liberal The Nation described the sanctions against Iraq as "a kind of ritualistic foreplay to the violent penetration of an entire region of the globe" (12/24/90). While sexual metaphors pervade the language of military conflict and conquest, the emphatic gendering of Persian Gulf War relations was characteristic as well of representations of the East/West relationship, which Edward Said argues have always been defined in sexual terms: these exotic, secretive, feminine regions were thought by Orientalists to "invite" Western "penetration and insemination" with its knowledge and civilization (Orientalism 209). During

the Persian Gulf Crisis, Orientalist depictions of the perverse sexuality of the Middle East pervaded the U.S. media, which implied that these cultural perversions would be morally righted by "the forces of good," in this case, the U.S. military.

"Lifting the Veil," reads the title of an article in Time magazine (9/24/90). Beside these bold letters, a Saudi woman wrapped from head to toe in a black *abayah* stands over a crate of tomatoes in the marketplace. The subtitle reads, "A secretive and deeply conservative realm, Saudi Arabia suddenly finds itself on the sword edge of change" (38). The image of the veil serves two purposes here: First, the rather Freudian imagery of the lifted veil and the sword suggests not merely the problematic liberation of Arab women, but also a new "intimacy" in U.S./Saudi relations. The Gulf Crisis, the article claims, has "ripped the veil off Saudi Arabia's closely shrouded ties with the U.S." This rhetoric assumes that veiling always operates as a form of oppression, so that this veil, whether it veils a country or a woman, should be ripped off by the West. Second, it assumes that the veiled Saudi woman, who serves the popular media image of Arab women, has no rights and no opinions of her own. Because the veil is often read by Western audiences as a form of absence, the purported purpose of imperialist intervention is to rip off the veil, and thereby to create a presence for the Arab woman.

Within U.S. imperialist ideology, the veiled Arab woman is effectively transformed into an object of imperialist rescue. As a "captive body,"⁵ she captivates U.S. media attention, in both the forms of an absent subject position, and as an irresistible sensuality, the deferral and multiplication of desire that results from the veil. In a Western context, the veil has traditionally been viewed as a signifier of inaccessibility, associated with the

hidden, forbidden woman shrouded in mystery, masked in a cloak of purity, underneath which lies unbridled sensuality. In the Arab world, the veil takes many forms and may signify piety, class differences, or even a radical fashion statement against Western influence, particularly in those countries where women have the choice of veiling.⁶ As I discussed in chapter one, French and British colonialists of the nineteenth-century saw the veil as a major obstacle to the modernization [read *westernization*] of the Arab world and sought to abolish the practice of veiling. With the rise of colonialism, the discourse on women and the veil came to the forefront of nationalist debates both in the West and in the Middle East, where the veil allowed women a private space within public spheres, but did not necessarily negate their presence. But the U.S. media interprets cultural practices such as veiling as captivity and powerlessness. Furthermore, war propaganda and colonialist discourse constructs the Arab woman as captive to Arab patriarchy rather than as captive to imperialist forces, or to both. The dominant discourse's emphasis on the Arab woman's body and her position within an alleged despotic family structure therefore allows external forces of racism and imperialism to continue unquestioned.

In his 1981 Covering Islam, an analysis of media representations of the Middle East, Edward Said prophetically predicted the U.S. "reoccupation of the Gulf region" to secure U.S. oil interests, a move justified by supposed Islamic barbarism as the threat to Western civilization (xiii). The consensus manufactured in the days leading up to the Persian Gulf War relied heavily on the conflation of all Arab groups under the "barbarism" of Islamic fundamentalism. Saddam, however, was somewhat belated in taking up the expected war cry of *jihad*, and the Iraqi state's generally secular policies were far from the conservative, fundamentalist policies of

Saudi Arabia whom the U.S. was defending.⁷ Said attributes U.S. consensus in this anti-Islamic battle to a rejection of medieval theocracy, but a major appeal was made in the name of women's rights, with repeated images of silent, shrouded Arab women.

The film Not Without My Daughter, released one week prior to President George Bush's January 15th deadline, reinforced U.S. notions of the brutality and "primitivism" of Muslim men who confine and oppress women and children in the name of their religion (Norton 27). Although the film takes place in post-revolution Iran, media propaganda succeeded in creating a monolith of Islam and associating it with the war effort. (Over a year after the war, I was listening to a radio talk show in Los Angeles in which a woman called in and made reference to the film. The deejay then said, "Oh yes, I saw that movie. Didn't it take place in Iraq or Saudi Arabia?" "Yes, that's right," the woman said, as if both could be right. The specific geographical and historical context of the film becomes irrelevant, making its racist propaganda more effective). In media representations during the Persian Gulf Crisis, the twentieth-century "civilizing mission" to avenge the rape of Kuwait and to unveil Saudi women was performed symbolically in the name of women's rights. The Saudi women's struggle for autonomy was distorted by U.S. media to portray them as dependent on the white cultural savior. Ironically, much of the destruction in Iraq, which included the deaths of tens of thousands of women and children, was justified by the "barbarism" of Arab sexism from which the U.S. was purportedly "protecting" Arab women.

Gendered Culture Clash: "We want to respect you (but we don't)"

A post-invasion episode of The Donahue Show entitled, "American Wife/Saudi Husband: Culture Clash" (10/23/90),⁸ examined the "volatile" relationship between Arab men and their U.S. wives. The producers of Donahue thought it "no bad idea for us," as Phil says, "to take a look at just some of the features of the culture of the Middle East, . . . with specific reference to those countries which are a part of and surround our Persian Gulf effort." The feature Donahue proposes to examine is the "sexism" of Arab Islamic culture. The underlying assumption: if the U.S. could understand the marital relationships and problems between a U.S. wife and an Arab husband, then we might decipher the Persian Gulf Crisis. The guest panel consisted of one Palestinian-American man, Dr. Hassan El-Yacoubi; Dr. Amar El-Yacoubi, his U.S. wife (who is consistently identified as a doctor, while Donahue refuses to recognize her husband's equal title); Laurie Kofahi, who "Loves being a Jordanian Wife;" Kristine Uhlman, who lost her children when she divorced her Saudi husband; and "Shelly," who divorced her Kuwaiti husband and cannot see her children. While the panelists discussed their varying attitudes toward Arab men, there was only one Arab man present as their representative; and while the predominantly white female audience joined in bashing Arab men, Arab women were absent from the scene.

The talk show's investigation into the ills of Arab culture is couched by Donahue in terms of cultural tolerance: "We do not presume to stand above you, look down upon you, and we want to respect your religion." He says this just after saying to his panelists, "In our audience, you're all members of the Communist Party." The identification of Arabs, or even Americans who ally themselves with Arabs, as communists, exemplifies the

transference of the Evil Empire label from the Soviet Union to the Arab world in the post-Cold War equation of cultural dominance. After this comment, Donahue says, "I hope a little humor is permitted within your culture." But what kind of "Western" humor is this? The joke is hardly humorous, nor is the fact that each time Donahue addresses Mrs. El-Yacoubi, he repeats her entire name, "Amar Jane Biddle Merritt El-Yacoubi," even though she insists three times, "You can call me Amar." Donahue, it would seem, is playing with identities, mocking them in his guise of cultural tolerance, while insisting on Arabs' absolute otherness, particularly when a U.S. woman adopts Arab cultural customs such as the veil.

The title of the show, "American Wife/Saudi Husband: Culture Clash," subsumes gender relations under a Saudi model, which is the most conservative of all Arab countries in its treatment of women. In fact, there are no Saudi Arabians on the panel; the only Arab man on the panel is Palestinian, and only one woman on the panel was married to a Saudi husband. The avowed purpose of the program, that of cultural understanding, is undercut by assumptions of a particular "Arab character," one represented exclusively by its men. Said explains such characterizations: "While it is no longer possible to write learned (or even popular) disquisitions on either 'the Negro mind' or 'the Jewish personality' it is perfectly possible to engage in such research of 'the Islamic mind' or 'the Arab character'" (*Orientalism* 262). The proliferation of articles on the "Arab mind" during the Persian Gulf Crisis and War attest to the racism inherent in what passed for political analyses.

In the context of this *Donahue Show*, Dr. Hassan el-Yacoubi represents, like Saddam Hussein in media reports of the war, the "Arab mind." He is portrayed as a man who got a good deal, having married a "Good

Western. . . upper-middle class, Philadelphia debutante" with a Ph.D. All of her superior qualifications are foregrounded from the opening of the show, and not until the final minutes is he presented as anything other than an Islamic fanatic with "a devoted wife." Finally, when Donahue asks him what he does for a living, we learn that he is a professor, and he says, "I wrote about eight books. And I have a book coming called The Arabic Koranic Islamic Paradigm. And we want the Americans to understand this." Yet, discussion of this book, which might allow the audience some understanding of Arab Islamic culture, is never broached, because it would present Dr. Hassan el-Yacoubi as more than a religious fanatic who has seduced his intelligent wife into the veil, and because it might allow for an analysis of cultural difference outside specifically gendered relations.

Dr. El-Yacoubi is positioned on the show as the stereotyped representative of Arab men. As he voluntarily teaches the audience an Islamic Prayer and responds to Donahue's questions by repeating religious phrases, the women in the audience boo and hiss at El-Yacoubi's responses. Shelley, one of the panelists, says of him, "This man is a very poor example, in my opinion, of what a good Muslim should be. He is making a spectacle of himself." However, as the only Arab male in a show about Arab sexism, he has already been positioned as a spectacle, an oddity, the thing we must fight against, on an individual or national level. The U.S. audience can assume that if he is a poor representative, then so are all Arab men, because they engage in spectacles of terrorism, religious fanaticism, and sexism, while they keep their women hidden under veils, especially their U.S. women who are superior to them in every way. The absent Arab woman is replaced by the U.S. woman who takes up the veil, but is obviously more articulate about her position, because she can speak from beneath this covering.

The notable absence of Arab women both on the panel and in the audience suggests one of the many ways that U.S. women serve as stand-ins for invisible Arab women. The veiling of these U.S. women enables them to "put on" an Arab identity, suggesting that the fashionability of "Arabia" might be merely a matter of dress. This manipulation of female agency accords Anglo-American women the right of representing, or speaking for, as well as "re-presenting," or acting as a fashionable semblance of, the Arab woman. Although the U.S. women panelists say much in defense of Arab culture, their words are often subsumed by the culture clash dramatized on stage. Donahue (himself ironically enough married to an Arab American woman, Marlo Thomas) becomes the Burtonesque liberator of women, another example of what Gayatri Spivak terms, "white men saving brown women from brown men" or better here, saving white women from brown-skinned Omar Sharifs turned religious fanatics ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 296). Furthermore, this transfer of cultural relations to the sexual realm of Arab man/white woman relationships reverses the colonialist model of Western "penetration" and rescue of the Arab east, and violates imperialist terms of domination. The only way to excuse the U.S. women's activities is through a purported "seduction" by an Othello or an Omar Sharif. Phil's presence, however, reminds us, despite the Arab man's "theatrical" attempts to be heard, who, in fact, is running the show. Ms. Amar El-Yacoubi and the two divorced women are there to remind us that miscegenation is a dangerous game, and Mr. El-Yacoubi is publicly emasculated to remind us of the supremacy of the White Man who assumes "a reasoned position towards both the white and non-white worlds" (Said, Orientalism 227).

In examining representations of Arab culture within U.S. popular culture, I want to emphasize the repetition of similar performances being played out within the U.S. news media: the veiled Arab woman embodies the powerlessness of Arab countries, even as Saddam Hussein, the despotic ruler and "terrorist" (whose forces were greatly exaggerated) represents the Law of the Father out of control. Saddam has been adequately described as prey to the "cult of virility" (Trablusi 31), and I do not wish here to defend his invasion of Kuwait or subsequent actions. However, in these consistently gendered representations of Arab men and women, little attention has been given to the fact that women in Iraq have equal opportunity and pay as well as the rights to vote, drive, and dress as they wish; rather, Iraqi women, who purportedly "sing the praises of Saddam," have been portrayed as the hysterical followers of a madman. Media representations of the Saudi monarch, King Fahd, also emphasized the sensuality/sexuality of the Orient, depicting him as a "tamed playboy" who had "engaged in myriad liaisons with women" yet who manages an "exquisite balancing act" between modernity and the feudalism of his kingdom (Church, *Time* 45). In contrast to Saddam, King Fahd's sexual escapades are cast in notably Western terms, as the playboy who "still has an eye for women," and his reign is depicted as a benevolent monarchy, despite the position of women within Saudi society. But the media's obsessive imaging of Arab male sexuality alongside exclusively veiled women (which represent approximately half of Arab women)⁹ reinforces the supposed perversion of Arab gender relations and the absencing of Arab women. In effect, the veil itself stands in for Arab women and covers over the contradiction of the U.S. military's crusade to protect and liberate women when the U.S. administration has consistently

supported those regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, that have been the most oppressive to women.

The Driving Demonstration: Driven Further Into Invisibility

While details of the war's potential destruction were covered up, the Saudi women's driving demonstration of November 6, 1990, was highly dramatized by the media as an event which exemplified the gender politics of Islamic fundamentalism to stress the West's superior treatment of women. On November 6, 1990, forty-seven Saudi women dismissed their drivers and drove through the *suq* (marketplace) in Riyadh, many with the support of their husbands and brothers who watched. The women insisted that the protest was a practical matter, that they feared the war would leave them without drivers; they wanted the right to drive, especially in the event of an emergency. Despite Saudi women's insistence to the contrary, U.S. reports emphasized the connection between U.S. military presence in the region and the Saudi women's struggle, depicting these women as agents of Western influence. The significance of the driving demonstration was evident from the number of groups that participated in the debate over this issue: the Saudi *mutawa* (religious leaders), the Saudi royal family, the U.S. media/military, and even the National Organization for Women. The assumption that women's rights were a Western rather than an international value fed into the ideology of the New World Order, which demanded respect for the Western values of liberation and democracy that the U.S. was purportedly in the region to defend. Reports of the demonstration were framed by displays of U.S. weaponry to suggest to U.S. audiences the vulnerability of the Persian Gulf and the chivalry of U.S. troops sent in to protect these feminized regions. Yet to cover over the contradiction of U.S. support of the repressive Saudi regime, the reports also fairly consistently

ended with claims that the Saudi royal family and King Fahd supported women driving, and that "by all indications" were moving slowly towards more liberal policies concerning women's rights. (New York Times, 7 Nov. 90 and AP reports).¹⁰ Another embarrassing fact to U.S. media predictors, however, was King Fahd's punishment of these women who had achieved a momentary presence in the U.S. media, his deference to the conservative religious leaders, and his use of the incident to reassert his control over his kingdom, which many Saudis felt had fallen under spreading Western influence. These facts were subsequently covered up by the media, and Saudi women slipped once more back into invisibility when they no longer served U.S. propaganda needs.

Whatever happened to Saudi women in the Gulf War, particularly those who participated in the driving demonstration? Although the mainstream media abandoned them for more picturesque bombing displays, reports have appeared in alternative presses (including Middle East Report and Ms. Magazine). The women, among them university professors, businesswomen, housewives, students, and teachers, were detained for twelve hours, interrogated and released to their closest male relatives. They were denounced by fundamentalist leaders as "corrupters of society," and their "immoral behavior" was rebuked in a song recorded in a chorus of children's voices and broadcast on children's television. According to an anonymous Saudi woman writing to Ms., "The women's phones were tapped ; they were fired from their jobs, and stripped of travel papers. Their families were threatened. They have lived for a year in terror" (Nov./Dec. 1991 17).

With the "modernization" of the Persian Gulf region, as well as other parts of the Arab world, Eleanor Abdella Doumato asserts that Arab women are forced to bear the burden of traditional culture and to serve as emblems

"of the moral values of the community" (37). In Saudi Arabia, where "the public invisibility of women has become a visible sign of the monarch's piety" (36), the driving demonstration occurred at a fortuitous time for the monarch when "oppositional voices to Western presence were nearing a crescendo" (37). To silence these voices and restore his power, King Fahd sacrificed these women to the *mutawa* in the defense of Islamic tradition. According to American newspaper accounts in mid-October of 1991, "thanks to King Fahd" the demonstrators have had their passports returned, and have received financial compensation for their lost income when they were forced to quit their jobs. Yet one Saudi woman writing anonymously in Ms. insists that the government's reimbursement was an attempt to break the women's solidarity and their support network, which had provided financial aid from local businessmen. Although some Saudi women are hopeful that their action will spark a greater women's movement, Doumato predicts that, "In the absence of open institutions to express political dissent, women will remain a reliable barometer of stability in the kingdom" and the means by which Saudi rulers will reassert their faltering authority (37).

White Women Saving Brown Women

After the driving demonstration, the National Organization for Women (NOW), which had been outspoken against the war since the early days of the crisis, joined in the battle to free Saudi women from the hands of Arab Islamic patriarchy. In a "Resolution on Troop Build-Up in the Persian Gulf" passed by the NOW Board of Directors on November 18, 1990, NOW elucidated five points of opposition to U.S. involvement in the Gulf:

- 1) Bush's military build-up as protection of U.S. oil interests and as a distraction from the U.S. economic crisis and the saving and loan scandal;
- 2) Saudi Arabia and Kuwait's subjugation and systematic oppression of women;
- 3) the billions spent in military mobilization means cutback in social services, for which women, the poor, and people of color will disproportionately bear the economic burden;
- 4) the deadly nature of today's conventional and biological weapons and their catastrophic effect on people and the environment;
- 5) Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as despotic clan-run monarchies complicit with western oil interests.¹¹

NOW's opposition to U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf was appropriated by the media, which focused almost exclusively on NOW's statement against the subjugation and oppression of women within Saudi Arabia, the assumption being that NOW, as a women's group, had the right to speak, and be heard, on women's issues alone. The revision of NOW's protest in the media served the "off-loading of women from the realities of social and political activity" (Williamson 110), and relegated them exclusively to the realm of gender relations.

However, NOW capitalized on the media attention they received. On November 27, 1990, NOW came out with a statement "denouncing Saudi Arabia for its attitude toward women--both its own citizens and female U.S. troops based there." According to a USA Today article entitled, "NOW blasts Saudis for treatment of women," NOW President Molly Yard connected Saudi Arabia's oppression of women with South Africa's apartheid policies, saying, "We would be outraged if the administration sent American troops to defend South

Africa from invasion, ordering black soldiers to 'respect the culture' by bowing their heads in the presence of white racists." Yard's analogy conflates racial and gender apartheid, thereby privileging gender oppression over racial oppression. In doing so, she fails to account for the complex and contradictory positionings of Arab women within the existing imperialist structure, or for the ways in which Arab women have defined their struggle. In the discourse of war, as in the discourse of fashion, gender often functions as a category that denies other forms of difference, including race and class (Jeffords 179). NOW further failed to see how gender issues were being invoked by the U.S. military/media to support not only a racist agenda, but, in fact, the massacre of Iraqis, including women and children. This strategy of using feminist rhetoric to support imperialist interests exemplifies Leila Ahmed's definition of colonial feminism:

Feminism on the home front and feminism directed against white men was to be resisted and suppressed, but taken abroad and directed against cultures of colonized peoples it could be promoted in a way that admirably served and furthered the project of the dominance of the white man. (Women and Gender 153)

Although NOW consistently denounced U.S. military presence, and later U.S. military actions, their denunciation of the war was subsumed in their attack against Arab patriarchy. In the USA Today article, for example, NOW's call for the withdrawal of U.S. troops is briefly mentioned; but in their statement against gender apartheid in Saudi Arabia, NOW set themselves up to be appropriated by the media as mouthpieces for the war. Although NOW's concern for Saudi and Kuwaiti women is viable, within the existing racist structure, NOW's position was predictably treated by the press to reinforce anti-Arab racism in this country and the absencing of Arab women. NOW's

purported solidarity with Arab women actually had the opposite effect in a way that is so predictable it calls into question what NOW had intended by the statement. Like the U.S. wives and converts to Islam on the Donahue Show, NOW stands in for the seemingly absent Saudi woman. In taking this position, the organization denies Arab women subjectivity and reinforces notions of the West as their cultural savior. In formulating a feminist anti-war agenda, NOW might have more effectively attacked the U.S. military for posing as liberators of Arab women and for their treatment of U.S. military women, rather than targeting Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as the seats of patriarchal oppression.

This tendency among U.S. women and feminist groups to position themselves in contrast to Arab women recurred in a post-war advertising campaign for Planned Parenthood marketed by the Hollywood Policy Center.¹² The advertisement depicts a veiled Arab woman and is captioned, "Abortion is illegal in Iraq. But at least they're not trying to pretend it's a free country"(see fig. 5). Reminiscent of anti-Arab war propaganda and of Jerry Hall's swimwear ad both in its juxtaposition of Arab and Western women and in its phrasing of this contrast, this advertisement simultaneously equates the repressions of the U.S. anti-abortion movement with the suppression of democracy and human rights in Iraq, a country now infamous in the U.S. for such violations. Once again, the ad blatantly misrepresents Iraqi women and, by suggestion, Arab women in general. For example, Iraqi women are not bound by law to veil, and there are conditions under which abortion is permitted in Islam. Although the ad purports a kind of solidarity between U.S. and Iraqi women "who never had a chance to fight for their rights," it depicts Arab women as the silent recipients of injustice at the hands of the Iraqi government. Arab women are represented in the ad to

suggest the hypocrisies of U.S. claims to democracy only as they reflect on U.S. women's rights to abortion. Ironically, the advertisement, which describes the U.S. as "the greatest democracy on earth," obscures the hypocrisy of such claims in light of U.S. military destruction of the lives of Iraqi peoples.

In negotiating the complex and often contradictory positionings of Arab women, particularly within the context of the Persian Gulf War, I have tried to show how female subjects, both Arab and Western, are manipulated within the discourse of war to greatly limit their forms of resistance. U.S. media representations of the Persian Gulf War substituted a concoction of colonialist fantasies and heroic myths similar to those found in nineteenth-century travel writings and twentieth-century popular culture for factual information on the events of the war. These cultural "fashion statements" follow a general trend within U.S. society in which news is more and more fabricated and shaped in the interests of the military industrial complex, obscuring the relationship between consumer capitalism, which markets sexuality and power, or sexuality as power, and the New World Order which presents its own sexual and gendered relations as well "ordered" under the Law of a more benevolent father. The repeated imaging of the absent Arab woman in the U.S. media reinforced these notions of Western cultural superiority and effectively stripped Arab women of agency by disallowing their "illegitimate voices" to be heard, voices which might have disrupted the racist, gendered stereotypes of Arab women and men. Many of the U.S. women who operated as the "legitimate speakers" or stand-ins for Arab women played their roles too well, reinforcing racist assumptions and aiding in the further oppression of Anglo-American women.

In its photojournalistic display of the "Images of 1991," Time included several pictures of heroism, technological wizardry, Iraqi defeat, and U.S. homecoming celebration, all of which featured men. One photo depicts a male sergeant returning home to his wife and children, captioned, "The women are waiting and the beer is cold" (30 Dec. 91 42). Women, it would seem, did not exist in 1991 except as commodities, like beer, to be shelved. Times' photo repertoire forgot not only the veiled Arab women and female victims of war, but U.S. military women as well. Although much of the "foreplay" of the Persian Gulf War relied on gender issues and "women's liberation" in order to mask its racist intentions and to prove the superior morality/sexuality of the United States, once the bombing began, both U.S. and Arab women were effaced or commodified by a myriad of masculine signifiers.

Saudi women, pushed further into invisibility by U.S. performances of "liberation," served as a "visible sign" not only of the Saudi monarch's piety, but also of the U.S. military's supposed anti-chauvanism. The U.S. military's visible performance of liberation, however, stands in stark contradiction to the invisible events censored from the U.S. media--bomber pilots watching porn movies, rampant sexual assault of U.S military women, Saudi women under house arrest, and tens of thousands of Iraqi women and children killed by U.S. bombs and in the aftermath of the war's destruction. These contradictions remind us that war, while often justified in the rhetoric of liberation, is rarely intended to liberate anyone--least of all women.

Despite the influx of U.S. businessmen and oil interests into Saudi Arabia, the country has in many ways resisted internationalization in its adherence to a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law, a reactive form of resistance that has placed the burden of culture on women and is

represented most saliently to a Western audience in the guise of the veiled woman. The Saudi women's driving demonstration and its repressive results exhibit the ways in which third world women's resistance is often bound within the limits of global capitalism, the military industrial complex, and cultural or nationalist movements. The tragedy of the Persian Gulf War should give us pause to question how the gender debate is invoked in the name of war. It is, after all, not surprising that NOW's attacks against Arab patriarchy were so readily appropriated to serve military interests, a problem due in part to the inability of many U.S. feminists to understand Western women's role within the legacy of colonial power structures and to distinguish between a feminism that serves the interest of *all* women, and "colonial feminism" which serves imperialist and patriarchal interests by granting white women a presence at the expense of brown women.

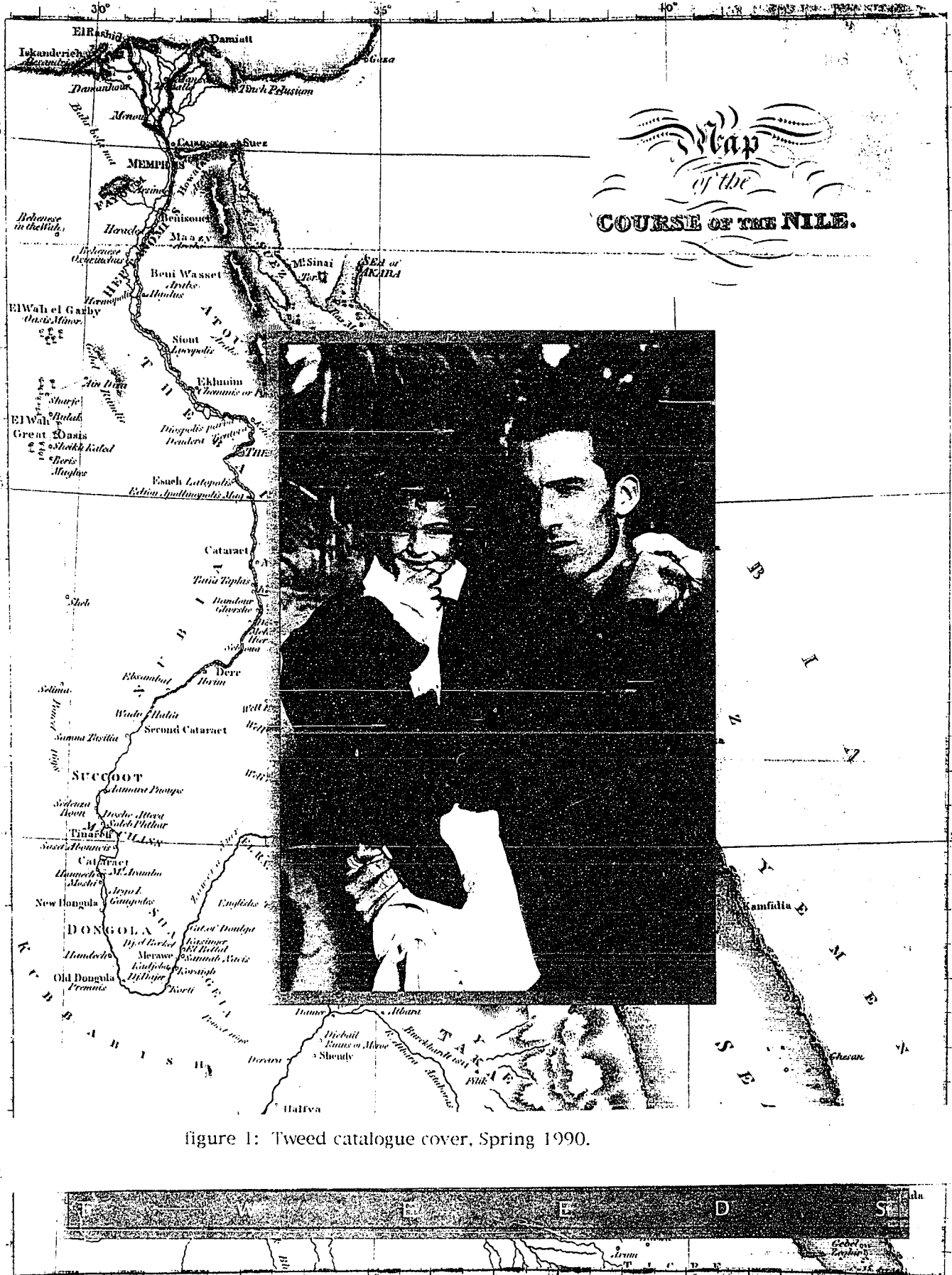


figure 1: Tweed catalogue cover, Spring 1990.

EGYPTIANS
ARE
NATURALLY
COURTEOUS.
FRIENDLY
AND
HARD-WORKING
PEOPLE.

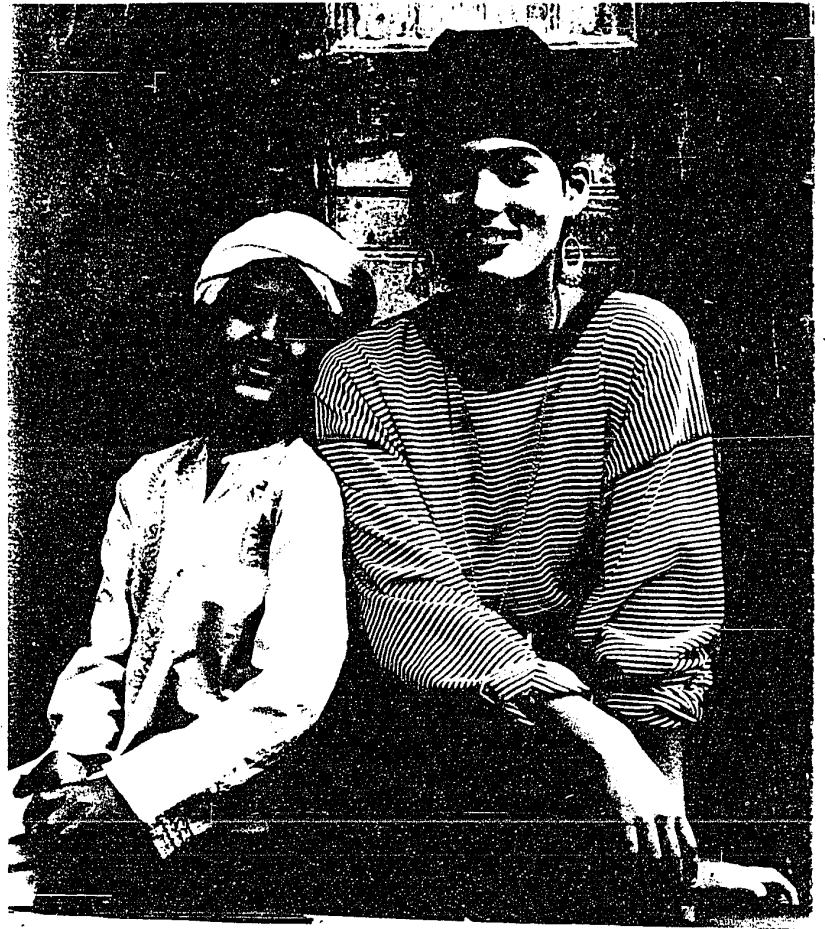


figure 2: Tweeds' explanation of Egyptians, Catalogue, Spring 1990.



figure 3: Tweeds' female model, cast alternately as the exotic Arab woman and as the colonial adventuress.

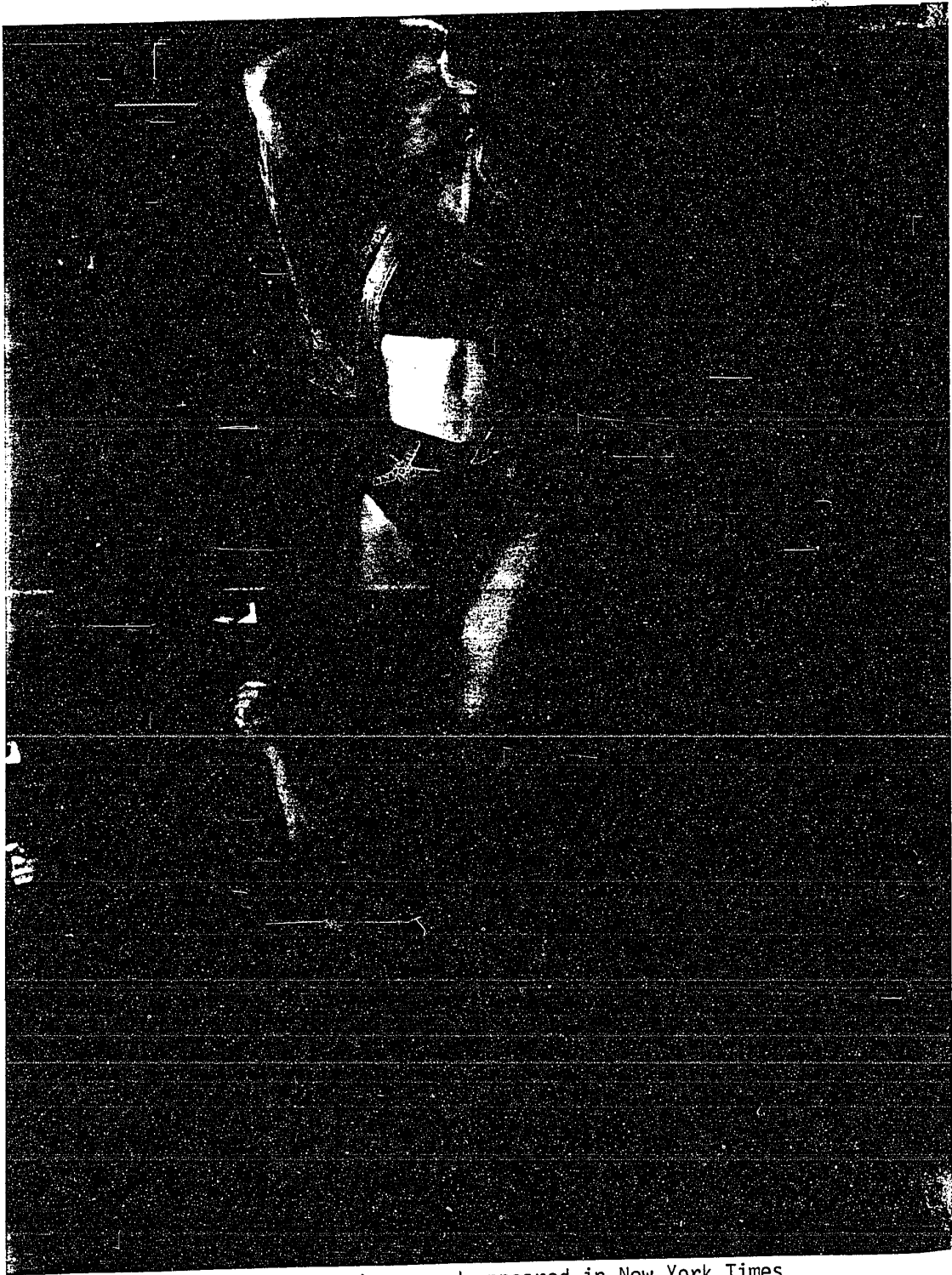
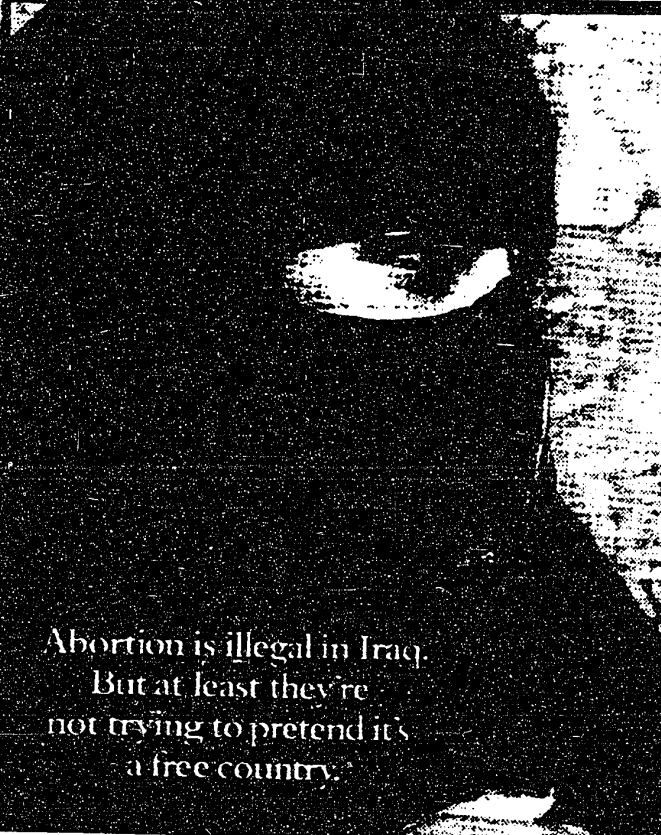


figure 4: This Jerry Hall swimwear ad appeared in New York Times Magazine, November 19, 1989. The text of the advertisement reads, "Jerry Hall's swimwear may have raised a few eyebrows in Morocco. But no one's really sure."



Abortion is illegal in Iraq.
But at least they're
not trying to pretend it's
a free country.

If we lived in Iraq, we wouldn't expect to have equality, freedom of religion, or freedom of choice. But since we live in the greatest democracy on earth, we tend to take these things for granted. Meanwhile, abortion rights are threatened in twenty-six states. We have a President who wants to ban abortion completely. And we have a vast Pro Choice majority too lazy or too busy to even find out where their elected officials stand on this critical issue. The people of Iraq never had a chance to fight for their rights. What's your excuse?

IT'S PRO CHOICE OR NO CHOICE

Planned Parenthood
of Austin
Administration Center 1209 Rosewood Avenue Austin, Texas 78702 512/472-0868

Hollywood Policy Center ad in The Austin Chronicle

figure 5: This advertisement for Planned Parenthood, produced by the Hollywood Policy Center, appeared in newspapers across the country in October 1992. After complaints by the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the ad was pulled from circulation (see note 11).

Notes to Chapter 3: Arab Women and the Persian Gulf War

¹ The Newsweek cover for February 18, 1991 read "The New Science of War/High Tech Hardware: How Many Lives Can It Save?" Cited in "Gulf War Coverage: The Worst Censorship Was at Home," EXTRA! (May 1991) 7.

² Otherness may be best defined here as a constructed *absolute difference* that is set in opposition to the "Self." In Orientalism, Edward Said explains how the Orient, the Arab East, has been a source of Europe's "most recurring images of the Other" (1). In the process of othering, third world peoples, women, and other subordinate groups are represented through stereotyped images that tend to say more about the Western interpreters than about the "other" peoples they purportedly represent. In the case of Tweeds, it is always the Western self one rediscovers in different cultural contexts, a point emphasized in the catalogue's unenlightened attempts to explain Arab culture.

³ Fatima Mernissi, Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society, 144. Mernissi rejects the tendency to compare Western and Muslim women, an argument which lapses into debates about cultural superiority. Rather, she asserts that a desegregated society that grants women equal rights both economically and sexually would be "an authentic Muslim society" (9).

⁴ Personal reference, Monia Laraoui, a Moroccan woman, told me the veil depicted in the Hall advertisement was not commonly, if ever, worn in Morocco.

⁵ In her essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (Diacritics, Summer 1987), Hortense Spillers uses this term to discuss the "captive body" of African-American women as a legacy of slavery. In borrowing the term, I do not mean to conflate black women's experience under slavery with Arab women's experience under Western imperialism. Her theory, however, explains how women of color are represented as captive to an "interiorized enemy," namely the men of their own culture, rather than to the external forces of the dominant Western culture.

⁶ The debate among Arab scholars and feminists regarding the history and socio-religious significances of veiling is complex. For more information on the practice of veiling, refer to Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam, Fatima Mernissi, Beyond the Veil and The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam, and Malek Alloula, The Colonial Harem.

⁷ The ruling Ba'ath party in Iraq is "secularist in its sensibilities" and has promoted "land reform and the provision of free social, educational and medical services." Saddam Hussein, however, has used violent repression to destroy his oppositor whom he accused of using "religion as a cover for politics" (32). See Michel Moushabeck, "Iraq: Years of Turbulence," in

Beyond the Storm: A Gulf Crisis Reader, eds. Phyllis Bennis and Michel Moushabeck (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1991) 30.

⁸ Unfortunately, I was unable to view this show, which was brought to my attention by a friend who described much of its visual contents to me. All of my analysis, therefore, is taken from the episode's transcript, which at times recorded the audience's verbal responses, such as booing, hissing, or laughter, but does not include any visual cues. All quotations are taken from Donahue transcript #3061, "American Wife/Saudi Husband: Culture Clash" Oct. 23, 1991.

⁹ Although it is difficult to find exact statistics on the practice of veiling, Saudi Arabia is the only Arab country in which veiling remains compulsory. In Algeria, and Libya, for example, most women veil; whereas in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, few women veil. See Joni Seager and Ann Olson, Women in the World: an International Atlas (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 3.

¹⁰ It is significant to note that the Saudi women who participated in the driving demonstration were from the upper echalons of Saudi society. Their struggle for driving privileges hardly compares to the sufferings of the women guest workers, from the Phillipines, Sri Lanka, etc., who have been abused and raped by their masters, both in Saudi Arabia and in Kuwait. These details were conveniently omitted from the U.S. media until after the war had ended.

¹¹ For the sake of brevity, I have paraphrased these resolutions, adhering closely to the original wording. For the resolutions in full, refer to "Resolutions on Troop Build-Up in the Persian Gulf" Passed by the National Organization for Women Board of Directors, November 18, 1990.

¹² The ADC Times: News and Opinions of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, November 1992, 13. The ADC Times report explains how the ad appeared in a number of newspapers in late October, 1992. The ADC asked the Hollywood Policy Center to pull this advertisement from their campaign because it misrepresents Arab and Muslim women in order to promote a political cause and is offensive to peoples of Arab decent. The center agreed to pull the ad, to consult with the ADC on any new ads regarding the Middle East, and to include an Arab American woman in future coalition meetings.

Chapter 4: Difference as Fashion: The [e]-Mergence of the [e]-Raced Subject in Postmodernism

You see the Americans do not know the names of the long and tedious list of deities and rites as we know them. Shorthand is what they know so well. They know this process for they have synthesized the Hoodoo of Voodoo. Its blee blop essence; they've isolated the unknown factor which gives the loas their rise. Ragtime. Jazz. Blues. The new thang. That talk you drum from your lips. Your style. What you have here is an experimental art form that all of us believe bears watching.

--Ishmael Reed, Mumbo Jumbo

What the ethnic self, the non-self, has to contend with is the reality of its entrapment in multiple temporalities and histories. It has to empower itself as "identity" and, at the same time, realize its potential to be a site, the *topos* of a revolution that is also its own meta-revolution.

--R. Radhakrishnan, "Ethnic Identity and Post-Structuralist Differance"

"Third World," therefore, belongs to a category apart, a "special" one that is meant to be both complimentary and complementary, for First and Second went out of fashion, leaving a serious Lack behind to be filled.

--Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other

When "race" enters the whitebread, picket-fenced world of Lumberton in David Lynch's film Blue Velvet, its dark face first appears as two black employees at Beaumont's Hardware Store, standing in the doorway of the office with wide smiles, in typically Uncle Tomish poses. "Oh, it's so good to have you back," one says to Jeffrey Beaumont after his father's heart attack, and we can almost hear the word "master" following. "Thanks, Double Ed," Jeffrey replies to both of them, for "race" here operates to form a "collective subject" rather than an individual. The blind one with a cane, a blind seer no less, runs the cash register and knows

where every item in the store is, while the other jokes jovially with the customers. In Lumberton, where insects teem beneath the finely clipped lawns, Otherness is tolerated as long as it doesn't threaten the town's pretty surfaces.

These black men, even as they are parodied, present no menace to the inhabitants of Lumberton, but Jeffrey's life is threatened when he becomes ensnared in the world of "Otherness," with dark, foreign women, fat women, gay men, working class folks. They are the ones who self-consciously masquerade--the seductive, foreign singer, Dorothy Vallens in her wig, Frank in his gas mask, the fat ladies in their cat glasses, the gay man with his lip sing of "Candy-Colored Clown" and his painted face--the ones who parody themselves, who signify upon their positions in society. These characters inhabit only this level of "reality," where self-conscious masquerade is exploited and exposed as perverse fantasy. But the greater perversion lies in crossing over the boundaries of these two realities. "Do Not Cross" reads the pink police tape bordering the field where Jeffrey finds the ear, but the tape is cut, the boundary crossed. And such is the movement of postmodernism as it discards the unified self and replaces it with the multiplicitous other, who insists, like Frank droning through his gas mask, *You're like me*. The prophet of a new postmodernism, an unlikely candidate as with most prophets, is the blinded, womaned, raced Tiresias, the embodiment of heterogeneity and oppression.

Blue Velvet, in its rendering of Otherness, suggests two typically postmodern means of representing the raced subject: that of parodying assumptions of absolute difference and the power structures inherent in such positionings, and that of desire, voyeuristic attraction to "becoming Other." What we find beneath the mask of Lumberton, beneath all the

deconstructions of the postmodern, is not pure simulacra, not nothing, but difference--fetishized for the pleasurable delection of white, middle-class, heterosexual subjects. In effect, the ethnic [or gay/lesbian, working class] self, as Radhakrishnan explains, becomes a site, a *topos* of the postmodern revolution.

Difference has become the fashion of postmodernism and may be the one ideology that will revitalize the movement. The suggestion has been made of late that postmodernism, with its negativized rhetoric, has deconstructed its deconstructions *ad infinitum*, indeed has worn itself out. If postmodernism has lost its vitality in its attempt at counterhegemonic production through "discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentering, indeterminacy, antitotalization" (Hutcheon 3), it seems to be the result of some unbridgeable *dis*-stancing of its critical position. This *dis*-stance, which views its subject oppositionally and from a afar, is the parodic stance of much postmodern writing, and, as Frederic Jameson argues, creates a "waning of affect," ("Postmodernism" 61) so that repetition loses the power to incite change. This loss of "vitality" through the play of a number of indeterminacies leads to a loss of political potency, so that we are left with merely the shattered mirrors of multiple subjectivity hanging in the grand hallway of aesthetic expression. Certainly postmodern discourse has effected change in ruling representations (Bove 6), but many critics question where do we go from here? While critics like Mark Edmundson prophecy a "new postmodernism," a *positive* postmodernism that celebrates the "creation of fragmented, multifaceted, multicultural selves" (Harpers 70), other critics, like Paul Bove and Linda Hutcheon attempt to revitalize the movement by placing its aesthetics within a socio-historical context, thereby using group politics theory as its model. Bove, arguing

against the scientific impulse of theory, problematizes the postmodern critic's reluctance to "abandon recognizable forms of cultural tradition even when theorizing what they agree is a new form of culture" (7).¹

This new cultural expression is "primarily European and American" (Hutcheon 4) and does not describe an international cultural phenomenon but one that emerged in the West contemporaneously with postcolonial discourse theory of the third world. The early works in anti-colonialist theory such as Albert Memmi's The Colonizer and the Colonized (1965), Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks (1967), Aimee Cesaire's Discourse on Colonialism (1972), may be described as characteristically postmodern in their attempt to counter hegemonic impulses and to deconstruct power relations inherent in the Western monologue of civilization and culture. The postmodern, as a Western phenomenon that grew out of the historical moment of the Algerian War of Independence (Young 1), then, marks an era of the "globalization of Western culture" and, paradoxically "European culture's awareness that is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world" (Young 19).² The claim resounds, however, that postmodernism somehow laid the conditions for an emerging multiculturalism, a space from which the formerly erased raced subject could speak and be heard. I would argue, however (as Lyotard does of postmodernism's relationship to modernism)³ that postmodernism is "a nascent state of postcolonialism." Employing Lyotard's equation then and changing the factors, a work can "become postmodern only if it is first postcolonial."

While postmodernism concerned itself primarily with an aesthetics of expression, postcolonialist discourse insisted on the political implications of our concern with questions of *difference*, and also exposed the problem

of negativized rhetoric. In the postmodern experience the *dis*-stance is chosen ground for undoing ideological apparatuses; in the colonial experience the *dis*-stance was imposed and served to alienate the raced or colonized subjects from themselves, so that they adopted the techniques of mimicry and masquerade in order to deal with the master.⁴ If masking, simulation, and mimicry are the condition of postmodern existence, as Baudrillard suggests, somehow within the works of British and Anglo-American writers, these strategies may have lost their power of menace.

'Race' and Postmodernism's Uncivilizing Mission

Although postmodern theory insists on "ineluctable," "nonsubsumable," "unpresentable" difference, this emphasis exposes postmodern discourse's entrapment in a persistent ideology that feeds off what it cannot colonize. Indeed, postmodernism, unless we include race theory and postcolonialist theory under this heading, has little to say directly about the raced subject except in the wider terminology of *difference*, which, as Jameson argues, has proven itself necessary to the survival of late capitalism. The danger of attempting some dialogue between the two discourses of postmodernism and postcolonialism is the threatening tendency of postmodernism to subsume or merge with the discourse of "interest group politics" (Bove 5). And these two discourses should not be subsumed under the name of "postmodern" for they arise from different impulses, especially in their relationship to the negativized rhetoric used to collapse the distance between self and Other.

The problem in theorizing or speaking about difference is the tendency to replicate the discourse of domination even as one speaks. As Bove questions whether "theorizing the postmodern [can] be a successful oppositional practice" (5), so Spivak questions whether the native

intellectual can speak for the subaltern. Intellectuals tend to fall back on traditional approaches, which as Stanley Aronowitz explains, either ignore difference which interferes with their reductive theories, or they marginalize difference as "'anomalies' to be incorporated at some future time into the paradigm" (qtd. in Bove 12). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the "Anomalous" serves as "the precondition for alliance necessary to becoming" ("Becoming. . ." 244). The French theorists, however, attribute an undue amount of power to the "anomalous" to resist recuperation, even though their own theories may be read as acts of colonization.⁵

In "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," JanMohamed defines colonialist literature, as "an exploration and representation of a world at the boundaries of 'civilization,' a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology" (64). Postmodern literature, in contrast, even as it denies the possibility of return to a "purer" state of existence, has set up an "uncivilizing" mission, a state of nativism, which is not so much a return as a desire to merge with the Other in a world unbounded by the encumbrances of "civilization," to break down Western signification and ideology. This "uncivilizing" compulsion both enables the expression of the raced subject by creating a meta-revolution at the level of language, and threatens to colonize the margins and stifle "native" expression by presenting what Ishmael Reed calls a "shorthand" of ethnic cultural expression. The postmodern text with its emphasis on difference "allows the ironic signaling of difference at the heart of similarity" (Hutcheon 26), wherein the raced subject functions as a convenient trope of such difference. However, the raced subject more

often stands for an ironic signaling of similarity at the heart of difference (Frank's drone, *You're like me*). As a result, the purpose of postmodern parody is twisted to serve hegemony rather than difference. Although Hutcheon's definition of parody depends on the interplay of texts, the tendency to read "Race" as *topos* sets up a parallel dynamic between identification and distance, as JanMohamed suggests by his use of "manichean allegory." The question remains whether non-ethnic postmodern writers/theorists may ever step outside their own position within the authority of hegemony and outside this fashion of difference, especially when representing the raced subject.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defines race as "a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems . . ." ("Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes" 5). Race, then, functions as Difference with a capital "D" and occurs not exclusively at the site of the skin or particular physical or linguistic traits, but signifies difference in every tissue and membrane of the raced subject, including the mind and spirit. Gates's term "irreducible" does not suggest the positive connotations of an "ineluctable difference," but rather signals an inability to get beyond the constructions of race as pervasive Otherness. The extent to which postmodern works have been able to manipulate this trope, to explode it, to signify upon it depends as much on who is speaking as it does on what is being said. In many postmodern works, as in colonialist discourse, "race" still plays that convenient sign of Otherness; raced subjects remain uninfused with a life or will of their own, but rather operate as a partial presences, as stereotypes that represent the dark, inscrutable side of the self, as in "the horror" of Conrad's Heart of Darkness. The parodic presentation of race in postmodern texts serves to

reduce the monolith of Difference and to make way for new representations, yet such parody can be read to reinforce racist stereotypes because we're not always sure who was supposed to laugh, and why the joke was so funny. Since postmodernism denies origins, parody, in effect, foists racial stereotypes back upon themselves, so that there is no exit, no non-stereotyped place to be. Thus, the mutual discomfort of dealing with the raced subject persists in postmodernism.

Parody and Menace

Linda Hutcheon describes parody as "a perfect postmodern form, in some sense, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (11). In recognizing "Race" in its irreducible form as a construct of the master, the postmodern writer may similarly create a raced subject, a Tiresian figure, like the blind, black "Double Ed" in Blue Velvet, weighted down by "handicaps," so that all differences are conflated and embodied within a single figure. Oppression at the hands of the master is parodied by multiple oppressions. Like the blind Tiresias, these parodic figures are otherworldly, blind, sexed and unsexed, [wo]maned, tapping snakes with walking sticks, moving blindly, slavishly through a world not of their creation. In John Barth's Lost In the Funhouse, the Other creeps into the funhouse and takes Ambrose's arm in the dark in the guise of a "blind Negro girl." This racial encounter, like much of postmodern writing, creates a "mutual discomfort" (97). Barth, although acknowledging the idea that in the dark we may open our souls for we are blind to difference, dismisses such discomfort as "the walls of custom, which even." Ending his statement thus, he leaves the reader to decide that perhaps even the "funhouse" of postmodernism cannot break the wall of

racism; even writing which seeks to deconstruct illusions of mimesis cannot get beyond skin color. That the "Negro girl" is blind and not vice versa sets this ironic staging of discomfort. Earlier in the story, Ambrose fantasizes about a girl with whom he'd share romantic intimacy: "they'd know each other's inmost soul's, be bound together *by the cement of shared adventure*" (87). The suggestion that the funhouse has the power to break barriers between "archenemies" (races), is only illusion, an artificial transgression of boundaries.

Although Barth's attempt at dealing with race is an early postmodern example and spurious at best, it exposes the parodic tendency to collapse all oppressions into "race" or gender stereotyping. Barth does make reference to the Master/Slave relationship as a childhood game called "Niggers and Masters," which Ambrose played with Peter and Magda in the backyard. The metaphor here, however, is primarily sexual: Magda willingly plays the submissive slave, kneeling and embracing Ambrose's knees, purchasing "clemency at a surprising price set by herself" (78). The piling up of handicaps (weaknesses) suggests a parodic comment on the nature of difference and powerlessness, but may merely reinforce the irreducibility of race by underscoring difference within a dehumanized symbol. Such parodies often fail to challenge the very forms of racism (or sexism) they represent, and the laughter falls flat.

Racial difference sets up this "manichean allegory," as JanMohamed calls it, in which the raced subject comes to embody all the "negative" projections of the colonizer. Although JanMohamed writes specifically of colonialist literature, his critique of European writers' commodification of the native "by negating his individuality" (64) applies aptly to the postmodern valorization of alterity. According to JanMohamed's model, the

European, "faced with an incomprehensible and multifaceted alterity" responds by either assuming that he and the Other are essentially the same and judging him by Western cultural standards, or he sees the Other as irremediably different but has little incentive to adopt the viewpoint of that alterity and turns to the security of his own cultural perspective (64). A parodic position enables both identification and difference and tends to *play on* the extreme of these two positions: perceiving the Other as irremediably different and judging him by Western cultural standards.

The non-ethnic postmodern writer/theorist, having already exploded the security of hegemony, may use race as a trope of resistance to systems of domination, so that the Tiresian figure is no longer the raced subject, but the postmodern subject becoming aware of the otherness within the self, similar to Virginia Woolf's use of "savagery" discussed in chapter two. Yet, the process of "becoming" suggests a turn to the viewpoint of alterity. JanMohamed characterizes these two textual approaches or treatments of the native according to the Lacanian scheme of the imaginary and the symbolic. "In the imaginary text structured by objectification and aggression, the native functions to reveal colonialist self-alienation . . . threatened by a metaphysical alterity that he has created, he quickly retreats to the homogeneity of his own group" (65). In postmodern representation, the underscoring of alterity as a self-created dynamic places all the control over such creation in the hands of the Western creator. The alternative to the imaginary model, found in the symbolic, reveals the typically postmodern awareness of the construction of the native "as a mediator of European desire," and such a model is more open to modifying the self/other dialectic" (66). To reach the symbolic state requires the de-centering of self and culture in the presence of the

other; but if the postmodern self is indeed already decentered, as the claims of postmodernism insist, why do these problems of dealing with the other still exist? The danger in the valorization of difference is that the raced subject still serves as mediator in this Self-revelation, and what has she or he to gain by this position? Perhaps the self has become recentered through difference, through the raced subject, and a new form of colonization has occurred. Like Conrad's captain Kurtz, trapped in his own self-image which he superimposes on the natives (JanMohamed 71), the postmodern Western "Self" deploys "race" to represent its own fragmentation.

The postmodern movement embraces difference as "menace," as Homi Bhabha defines it in "Of Mimicry and Men," a menace which threatens because it is difference that is total, but not quite (132). Though mimicry asserts a state of absolute *imagined* difference, postmodernism exposes just how imagined this difference is, even as it reinforces difference as such. In Don Quixote, Kathy Acker parodies American stereotypes of Arabs that reiterate Orientalist assumptions of Western superiority. Ironically, in the following passage, we could replace Arab with postmodern writer, with Acker herself:

The Arab leaders are liars; lying is part of the Arab culture in the same way that truth-telling and honest speech're American. Unlike American and Western culture (generally), the Arabs (in their culture) have no (concept of) originality. That is, culture. They write new stories paint new pictures et cetera only by embellishing old stories pictures. . . They write by cutting chunks out of all-ready written texts and in other ways defacing traditions:

changing important names into silly ones, making dirty jokes out of matters that should be of the utmost importance to us such as nuclear warfare. You might ask how the Arabs know about nuclear armaments. Our answer must be that humans, being greedy, fearful, and needing vicious power, have always known. The Arabs are no exception. For this reason, a typical Arab text or painting contains neither characters nor narrative, for an Arab, believing such fictions're evil, worships nothingness. (25)

Acker's "insert" of Arab stereotypes, which parodies the very cause-effect logic which creates stereotypes, resonates with hegemonic critiques of the postmodern, its lack of originality, lack of character, narrative, its defacement of tradition, use of pastiche; all seem more a critique of the critique of postmodernism in which Arab culture serves as a stand-in for difference, and is, in the process, praised as a culture with a lack of pretense of truth and originality. Linda Hutcheon describes how parody works to "paradoxically enact both change and cultural continuity: the Greek prefix *para* can mean both 'counter' or 'against' and 'near' or 'beside'" (26). Acker's parody of Western notions of Arab culture, speaks beside this different form of cultural expression which is characteristically postmodern more than it is characteristically "Arab."

Acker's last line, the assertion that the Arab worships nothingness, critiques the anti-postmodern conflation of indeterminacy and nothingness. The revelation of mimicry, that there is no presence or identity behind the mask, is replaced by the postmodern notion that the only presence is the play of difference. Mimicry, *repetition with a difference*, functions like parody, *repetition with a distance*, as a menace to

hegemonic order. Yet where colonialist literature tended to foreground resemblance, the native's mimicry of the European, postmodern literature tends to foreground the menace, the threat of otherness which resists signification. We can no longer speak of the raced subject in terms of a partial presence, since all presences are partial and shifting. In postmodern works by non-ethnic writers, however, the raced subject's presence is still more partial, more trope-ic, less humanized.

Acker's Empire of the Senseless engages again her trope-ic use of Arabs, simultaneously returning postmodernism to its roots in the Algerian revolution, and appropriating the revolution by displacing it within the metropolitan centers of Paris and New York to create a postmodern dystopia of failed revolution. The blackness of the story's heroine, Abhor, serves as a convenient sign of Otherness for Acker who is more concerned with revolutions of sexuality and gender, than she is with examining and revisioning racial relations. Similarly, the Algerian revolution signifies the failure of political resistance that is grounded within dominant ideology to subvert existing power relations, especially relations of gender and sexual difference. As Abhor says, "Yes. The Algerian revolution had succeeded. Whatever political success is worth . . . In this city, women are just what they always were, prostitutes" (109). Although Acker levels a valid critique against the gender politics of the revolution, in reducing it to an inversion of imperialist politics, another senseless empire, she, in effect, negates anti-colonial struggle. The conflation of colonial, race, and gender oppression are subsumed in Abhor's black woman's body to embody not the transgressions of race, but those of gender.

For Abhor, like Acker, language, particularly in the form of fiction, is the tool to dismantle the codes of empire: "Language, on one level,

constitutes a set of codes and social and historical agreements. Nonsense doesn't per se break down codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the code" (134). One such unacceptable, forbidden language she uses throughout the novel is Algerian colloquial Arabic which signifies a "degenerating language," "a sign of nothing" (53). Again, the language of "failed" revolution stands in for the failure of postmodern indeterminacies to effect radical social change. If Empire of the Senseless is to be read as "a text of terrorism" (McWilliams 160) against imperialist authoritarian structures, it relies on stereotypes of Arabs as terrorists to promote its own postmodern methods of terror.

Becoming Arab, Becoming Other

The specular nature of colonialist literature is replicated in the postmodern, but whereas the Other used to serve as the negative specular image, the Other is now a positive image, one the Western self moves toward "becoming", but a specular image of the dominant self just the same. In Empire of the Senseless, Acker entitles her third chapter "On Becoming Algerian" and assumes the narrative voice of "An Arab female," which is, of course her own voice. Positioning Arabs as the inverse of Western imperialism, Acker makes a virtue of their displacement, and depicts New York City itself as "becoming Arab": "New York City, my home, Liberty. Who do you hate more, boy? Niggers or Arabs? I think you hate Arabs more. Once your deep culture was black. Now you're becoming Arab" (163). While the underlying motivation of colonialist literature was the desire "to impose oneself on another and to be recognized by the Other" (JanMohamed 66), the process of becoming Other tends to subsume the

Other within the self. In Acker's writing, the Arab represents simultaneously virtues and failures of the postmodern.

JanMohamed suggests that in order to comprehend Otherness, to bridge the distance between self and other, "the object of representation, the racial Other, must be placed on the same temporally and socially valorized plane as that of the author and the reader" (70) and the viewer. The self/other distance is bridged by an understanding of racial alterity through the state of "becoming" Other. Like Kipling's Kim, we must live "in a world of pure becoming. . . as a movement into the future" (79); however, Kim is a particularly problematic figure of becoming, because he participates in the Great Game of British colonial conquest of India. Does the racial Other, then, now embody this potential and demand, and demand from the self a repositioning, a call to say "I will now inhabit the margins with you?" To what extent does this marginal cohabitation allow for the emergence of the raced subject, and to what extent does it threaten complete merger with the self and complete erasure?

The raced subject's tendency to deny a fixed identity, for example by consistently changing the "name of preference" for his or her racial group, shows a distrust of the "mask" of identity. Lyotard argues that we no longer strive to represent difference as such; but rather to make the invisible visible, yet still as invisible, to make silence speak, but still as silence. To become "other," as Deleuze and Guattari suggest is to become "imperceptible," to resist any kind of signification. Bove cites Aronowitz who "rejects the traditional intellectual's role of producing representation of the desire of the oppressed" (18). Gayatri Spivak, similarly, emphasizes the impossibility of such an understanding of the Other: "It is impossible for the contemporary French intellectual to imagine the kind of Power and

Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 280). According to Spivak, in their attempt to theorize issues of Otherness, French intellectuals fall into the trap of reproducing "the axioms of imperialism" ("Three Women's Texts" 243). Although Deleuze and Guattari advocate "becoming animal," and "deterritorializing," to create a postmodern nirvana where intensity, imperceptibility, and multiplicity reign, where boundaries between the human and animal become indeterminate, in order to defy the "civilizing mission" of the imperialist project, their failure to acknowledge the ideological mechanization operant behind culture even as they are smashing such apparatuses, leads them to take the "slaves" tools into the master's hands, or merely to use the "Third World" as an implement of their desires.

As Spivak explains, the mirroring of the Othered self in the selfed Other (Narcissus) was interrupted by the fracture of imperialism. Furthermore, in destroying the symbolic to unleash the Imaginary, Deleuze and Guattari, like Acker, also destroy the Other, saying there is no mirror, calling the Other self, making the minor major, indeed creating a theoretical "slumming" which valorizes and appropriates dislocation and dehumanization in positive terms. Their theory reverses JanMohamed's taxonomy which privileges symbolic texts as more aware of their use of "the native as a mediator of European desire" (66) than imaginary texts which are "structured by objectification and aggression" (65). Their failure to account for their use of the Other leads them into these traps of the imaginary. Spivak expresses her dissatisfaction with the "presupposition of *necessarily* revolutionary potential of the avant-gard: even if one knows how to undo identities [read *deterritorialize*], one does

not necessarily escape the historical determination of sexism [read *imperialism*]" ("French Feminism in an International Frame" 144). Although Deleuze and Guattari's subtle "revolution" of language and thought operates to change the means by which the Imaginary acts on the real, they ignore the "historical reality" of imperialist oppression in worlds not their own, worlds where people rather than words are deterritorialized or where "becoming animal" was the decree by the sovereign Subject imposed on the colonized. Certainly, the theorists' attempt to get away from such roles by rejecting the symbolic order and undoing such articulations and hierarchies can benefit the Other of Europe (here I include the post-colonial and raced subject, although their contexts may be different), but in the Westerner "becoming" Other what happens to the Other who cannot become other than what Other always is/was? Has the Other now become merely a narcissistic reflection of the Western self? In transforming the Other from his/her traditional role as a *negative* specular image of the European self into a *positive* image, through "uncivilizing mission" of postmodernism, such texts and theories still maintain a relationship of narcissistic identification which can render the Other, the minor, invisible.

Deleuze and Guattari take care to define "becoming" as a process that resists resemblances and identification. The process of "becoming" is not synonymous with the mechanisms of mimicry, wherein the mimic men of colonialism were forced to adopt the traits of their European masters. Mimicry alluded to the desire to emerge as "authentic" (Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Men" 129), an authenticity that could only be attained through partial representation. In the process of "becoming" other, the "self" must first do away with notions of an authentic other, but the

underlying assumption, the attraction and desire, still seems to reside in the identification of the Other as more authentic than the self.

This transformation "into something rich and strange," is played out in Lois Gould's novel A Sea Change. The beautiful housewife and model, Jessie Waterman's metamorphosis into B.G., the black gunman, her rapist, resolves the question of Otherness--what to do with Caliban--by taking the idea of "becoming Other" to its logical end. Although the novel problematizes issues of dominance and control in terms of gender--as Jessie writes on her painting, "Active exercise of male control is necessary to establish and maintain social order" (77)--the understated blackness of the gun (phallus) man further complicates Jessie's evolution and her newly assumed position of power. In "The Other Question," Homi Bhabha describes skin color as the site of castration, the disempowerment of the raced subject. Both Jessie and B.G. have this "impotence" of castration in common, although their oppressions and privileges are very different. In her stream of consciousness in the opening scene, Jessie lets out that B.G. may just be the validation of her victim license (14), for although he dominates her, has her on her knees, he is some sort of victim himself. The Other, then, serves as the license or mediator to fulfill fantasies, whether they be fantasies of dominance or victimization.

Jessie's multiple subject positions are constructed by her male dominators--as a model she is the object of the camera's gaze, as wife she kneels at her husband's feet, as B.G.'s victim, she "never ceased to think of B.G." (59). Her understanding of her own subjectivity is subsumed under that of male dominance: "Subjecting her, so that she has to answer him, give him what he wants. She's the willing subject, but he controls her absolutely" (76). Jessie's transformation into the Other may be interpreted

as freedom from domination, for she becomes increasingly asocial, attains a freedom from her previous social constraints, implied by her escaping to another island, another territory, another body. Is this the exact same B.G. who tied her up in her blue bedroom and raped her, a man capable only of domination? As this new B.G., Jessie enjoys life as a "new man" living as a romantic artist in near isolation and poverty, entertaining women from time to time. Indeed has B.G. as well as Jessie undergone a sea change, so that he is no longer just a black gunman but a human being? Through Jessie's process of "becoming", B.G. is transformed from the Other to an other, thereby breaking down the manichean allegory of otherness. The problem is that all of B.G.'s humanness comes from Jessie--a blatantly racist representation. We understand B.G. only in relation to his will to dominate, still as a partial presence. Indeed, Jessie has no other understanding of B.G. except for this aspect of his Otherness, his domination which like her own, grows from a position of powerlessness. Jessie's transformation suggests that those who inhabit the margins are more free, but as with similar theories of "becoming" Other, she appropriates otherness with only its positive connotations.

Deleuze and Guattari would have us believe that narcissistic identification is not the operant mechanism behind "becoming," but that an alliance with the outsider puts this process into motion. In both A Sea Change and Blue Velvet this alliance is necessarily one of sexual dominance and abuse. The other imposes his/her presence on the self, and the self is seduced into the process of change. Blue Velvet inverts the relationship of sexual domination so that it is difficult to extricate the "abusive" voyeurism of Jeffrey, from Dorothy Vallens' replication of abuse towards Jeffrey in response to her own sexual oppression. She stands over

Jeffrey with a knife, forces him to undress and forces herself upon him sexually, just as B.G. ties up Jessie and rapes her with his "gun." *You're like me*, Frank drones through his gas mask, before he smears on his lipstick and violently kisses Jeffrey. What remains "imperceptible" in Deleuze and Guattari's theory is this struggle with domination, the objectification and aggression inherent in imaginary relations, that are so readily transformed by the use and abuse tactics of postmodernism. Jessie, in her struggle with domination, discovers that she is "just an other among others" (Trinh, Woman 99), and her metamorphosis is supposed to be viable to us because of her "other" experience as a woman; as with Acker, racial and sexual "becomings" are interchangeable within the textual world of postmodernism.

The Problem of Fashion

"Let us be witness to the unrepresentable, let us activate the difference and save the honor of the name," asserts Lyotard with a flourish in his conclusion to "What is Postmodernism?" (82). Since difference is the site where resistance to hegemony occurs, it is through difference that the postmodern creates this new form of culture. Hutcheon admits that "female (and black) explorations of narrative and linguistic form have been among the most contesting and radical" (16). In much of postcolonial literature, the function of the artist and writer as the healer of the community is more eminent; storytelling works as a form of "everyday resistance." Lyotard argues for an aesthetic of the sublime in which "pleasure derives from pain." It is too simple to translate this into some moralistic maxim of making a song of one's suffering, but if we analyze say, Oedipa's crisis in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 to represent the unrepresentable, we see in Oedipa the failure of the sublime to present an object which might come to

match a concept (the horn for example), but also the failure of imagination to present any emotion, be it pleasure or pain. If we fail to experience that which is unrepresentable as a detective engaged in "intellectual labor," rather than as one who is unrepresentable, then we cannot be a viable witness to the "unpresentable," for there is little at stake in it for us. When we speak of the unrepresentability of difference and use the raced subject to embody this inscrutable difference, we can forget that the "self" too is unrepresentable.

Both parody and "becoming" as means of dealing with the raced subject are discomfoting, as well they should be. As methods, they reinforce the *topos* of the raced subject in the postmodern battle for difference, but they do not grant the raced subject any subjectivity--or agency--at all. While parody serves to break down racial stereotypes by exposing imaginary functions of the self/other relationship, "becoming" promises a rapprochement between the self and other. However, just as Heart of Darkness gives us little more understanding of the African Congo, but rather represents Kurtz's otherness, or the other side of the novel's speculator--namely Marlowe--or the alienation of otherness as merely a projection of the self's interiority; so too the raced subject often serves a similar function, and thereby still serves the master. "Becoming" seems valid as a *process* of bridging distance, but it also threatens at mimicry's "danger of becoming mottled," of camouflage of the other. The ensuing revolution would be one of "becoming-Third World," but only with its most positive connotations: a Third World dystopia that camouflages all oppression.

There should be no easy reconciliation between otherness and its representations. In Reed's Mumbo Jumbo, his parody of detective fiction

engages the reader in a search to represent the unrepresentable, to resist the disconnectedness of postmodernism. In his own meta-critique on theory, Reed expresses the inability of theory "to tell us who the loas are, what we call spirits were," and our tendency to make up our own book, our own theories to help us out. "What it boils down to, La Bas, is intent. If your heart's there, man, that's 1/2 the thing about The Work. Even the European Occultists say that. Doing The Work is not like taking inventory. Improvise some. Open up, Pa Pa. Stretch on out with It" (130). The ethnic writer does not have the market on difference, but he has successfully asserted that behind the mask of mimicry exists a presence, a life force like Jes Grew that has the power to resist nothingness.

Mark Edmundsen suggests that American cultural narcissism has created an aesthetic that is too self-conscious, too self-obsessed to produce vital works, but that "the prospect of our becoming the pupils, at least for a while, of writers from the Third World (and elsewhere) isn't entirely dispiriting" (70). While Edmundsen attributes the success of ethnic writing to its freshness of metaphor and refusal to embrace the negativized rhetoric of postmodernism, I see its success in its means of dealing with difference that creates a doubling of both negative, undoing, and positive movement to reterritorialize. For example, The Signifying Monkey, as Henry Louis Gates defines it, reverses the received racist image because "he dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language" (286). That this method of parody is more effective resides in the positioning of the monkey and his ability to *reverse* to turn back against and to re-versify, to create from the negative a positive identification. Furthermore, the ethnic writer does not write from intellectual labor, but from "an experience of displacement that

creates a world of possibilities "(Kaplan 198). Habermas critiques "the splintering of culture from life": the ethnic writer, in repairing this sever of dis-experience, creates a world made new.

The British and Anglo American writers I have mentioned perform race strategically to deconstruct or parody dominant productions of otherness and to revitalize themselves by "becoming other." Yet race, as a fashionable difference in postmodernism is another mode of exploitation. Henry Louis Gates asserts that "we must understand how certain forms of difference and the *languages* we must employ to define those supposed differences not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other" (15). In making difference a fashion, postmodernism has tended toward maintaining what Trinh terms a "separate development" of the raced subject. In "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," Caren Kaplan cautions "against a form of theoretical tourism, where the margin becomes a linguistic or critical vacation, a new poetics of the exotic" (191). The revolution of "major" literature is not, however, an entirely distinct battle from that being fought in the interest of the "minor" or raced Other. Deleuze and Guattari's quest "To find . . . linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape" (27), offers a meta-revolution at the level of language where the Third World represents the potential of their "uncivilizing mission," but is wanting in some grounding in the political realm. If we read "Third World" as Trinh defines it, "all non-whites in struggle against all forms of Western dominance" (Woman 98), the intentions would more clearly further the movement of the postmodern. To draw closer to the viewpoint of alterity and heterogeneity through the raced subject requires that we recognize our part in the domination of the

other and that we not forget the rightful inhabitants of these "Third World" zones.

Notes to Chapter 4: The [e]-Mergence of the [e]-Raced Subject in
Postmodernism

¹ In this context, it is significant that Bove retains a place for the "literary critic" while attempting to rethink "his" domain.

²For an interpretation of the relation between anti-colonialism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism, see Robert Young, White Mythologies: Writing History and the West. Young argues that if poststructuralism, with its decentering of Western history and culture "is the product of any single historical moment, then that moment is probably not May 1968 but rather the Algerian War of Independence" (1).

³See Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, where he argues that "postmodernism is a nascent state of modernism" (79). Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁴There is also considerable movement between postmodern and postcolonial discourses. Homi Bhabha and R. Radhakrishnan, for instance, draw upon both postmodernism (Lacan and Derrida, respectively) and anti-colonialism (Fanon, most obviously in Bhabha's case).

⁵ See Caren Kaplan's "Deterritorilizations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse" (Cultural Critique, Spring 1987), as well as my further discussion of Deleuze and Guattari later in this chapter.

PART II: Third World Women and Narratives of Identity

The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurs to her the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalizing strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure . . . Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in the undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out.

--Trinh T. Minh-ha, When the Moon Waxes Red

**Chapter 5: Sittee: or Phantom Appearances
of a Lebanese Grandmother**

I know that whenever a group of women are gathered together, the grandmother always makes a phantom appearance, hovering above them.

--Angela Carter

When you kill the ancestor, you kill yourself.

--Toni Morrison

My grandmother's passport is written in French. At the time she took to travel she was twenty-four and Lebanon and Syria were under French mandate. The year was *mil neuf cent vingt et un*, 1921. This document, issued by the *Haut Commissariat de la Republique Francaise* in Beirut grants Mlle. Victoria Brahim Simon, born in Lebanon (Liban) in 1897 in Douma, died in _____, permission to visit Los Angeles, California, USA to be reunited with her mother and brothers. It describes every detail of her anatomy:

age - 24
size - 160 cm
health - good
hair - chestnut,
eyebrows - "
forehead - ordinary
eyes - green,
mouth - small
beard - _____
mustache - _____
body - round
face - "
complexion - white

But the accompanying picture of my grandmother in three-quarter profile is more telling. She stands straight, her chestnut hair drawn back from her face and tied up in a black velvet bow covering the side of her head. Her eyebrows form a sculpted arch above her eyes, which stare obliquely beyond the camera. Her round face is stern. Her arms envelop her wide

body, her hands in a tight clasp over her belly. At twenty-four in Lebanon she is a veritable old maid.

According to her naturalization papers, in 1929, I see that she is thirty years old, two years younger than she would be according to her passport. The paper bears no picture of her, but states that her complexion, hair, and eyes are now brown, dark brown even. Maybe, I think, this is part of the process of naturalization, the loss of years, the gaining in darkness, the irony of a procedure that as it naturalizes an alien, making her "as if a native," defines her as darker, as Other. The loss of years must have been an act of self-invention, a little lie on my grandmother's part, for the story was told that she had lost her birth certificate back in Lebanon and no one ever knew her age. But the darkness, the dark of her complexion, the brown of her eyes, and the dark brown of her hair on this paper could only be attributed to some *trompe l'oeil*, or the monochromatic vision of the naturalization clerk. As long as I knew my grandmother, her skin was fair and her eyes were green, though in later years they were clouded by age.

She came from the Old Country, a place I imagined where everything was dusted and worn, so she was old to me and her ancient air was enchanting. Hers were an enduring people from a nomadic tribe who some generations ago had settled on fertile hillside in the mountains north of Beirut. It was a comfortable place in peacetime, I was told, but the city had known little peace for longer than she could remember. Sometime between the two great wars, fleeing famine and plague, she and her brother ventured to the New World.

My grandmother spoke little of her old way of life, but it bled through into everything she did. Her speech was thick and heavy, scattered with unfamiliar words; her cooking, seasoned with foreign flavors. It was the source of her pride, revealed in the dimensions of her round body. Her full face rested atop her shoulders, her jowls jiggling with delight as she uttered her favorite words, "Suhtein! Suhtein!" (Eat! Eat!). Her nose was peculiarly large, a bulbous mass which spread from cheek to cheek with a slight indentation at the tip. In keeping with Arabic tradition, I called her "Sittee," thinking it was her name, but later learned that it meant "my grandmother" in that foreign tongue she so often spoke.

"Sittee, I hope my nose isn't as big as yours when I get old," I giggled.

"Hmph! Well, when you stop growing, your nose doesn't, and when you've lived as long as I have, you end up with this." She chuckled, touching the tip of her nose with her red-painted fingernail.

Sittee had spent most of her life eluding years and the fragmented history of her homeland. She took from time freely, handfuls of years she felt had been stolen from her. She disguised her age as best she could, dying her hair rusty red, painting her lips with ruby gloss. And as her sight grew dim, I would sit beside her on the couch while she held a cosmetic mirror out in front of her, her jowls expanded in the magnified image of the glass. "There's one," she'd say, pointing out the uncomely whiskers that sprouted from her double chin, then I plucked them out, wincing more at the pain than she. In my eyes, she was ancient from the day I was born.

On weekdays I lived in an American world. But on weekends, I lived in a world of foreign foods, strange language, incense, ritual, bazaar and bizarre. Sittee embodied this difference. She was a widow, a bitter woman

who maintained notions of her nobility from the Old Country even as she rolled grape leaves in the tiny kitchen of her Hollywood apartment. As a child, I was enchanted by her scent of lemon jasmine, her dyed red hair, her painted nails, her bureau full of sampler gift items (she would let us choose one gift every week, gifts she got at luncheons, whatever they were). And when she came to visit, she came bearing *fistu* (pistachio nuts), pomegranates, *kibbee* (pressed lamb), Syrian bread, and holy bread. There was something sacred and human in this culture that let you take holy bread home, bread that was thick and full, unlike the stale wafers of the Catholic church where my mother often took us on Sunday mornings. I looked forward to the monthly bazaars at the Orthodox church where I could wander from table to table, tasting honeyed pastries, trying on bracelets and bangles, holding tightly to my grandmother's hand. "Ya *a'lbee inte*," she would say to me, as she spread her fingers across my chest. "You are my heart."

If a woman could be a land, then Sittee was Lebanon to me. If a person could be colonized as a country, then Sittee still bore the scars of French colonization. Once while I explored the Old Country relics in her apartment--pointed gold slippers with braided straps, chiseled brass plates, pastel-colored glass trays holding *fistu*--I found a stash of letters scrawled with foreign writing, and since I was learning to read, I had taken to reading anything I could get my hands on. I pressed the thin paper to my nose. Everything, when held close enough, smelled of lemon jasmine and Jean Nate. Sittee saw me trying decipher the letter, pried it from my hands, and began reading aloud in a strange, melodic sound that I knew was not her native Arabic. I stood staring up at her, my eyes fixed on her mouth, the ruby lipstick faded from the edges of her lips which formed round "o's"

and purring "r's." She looked down at me and drew me to her. "French," she said, "Isn't it a beauuuu-tiful language. Beauuu-tiful." I nodded. "I learned it in school," she said, "and when you are old enough, you must study French, too." Years later, I did. And though she never told me to learn Arabic, I studied that too, but never learned to speak it as fluently.

That day, while I was thinking about the beauty of the French language and distant lands were everything was either beautiful or old, I escaped into Sittee's bathroom and locked the door. I took the mirror from her counter, a mirror encased in platinum with the initials "VSS" engraved on the back in a delicate hand. Victoria Simon Saliba. I knew Victoria had been a queen of some place, and that Sittee was named after her. Sittee always kept that mirror on her bathroom counter beside a matching platinum brush that was as big as my head and had soft natural bristles. But I never understood why she would need a mirror when she had that giant mirror before her on the wall, so I looked at these relics from the Old Country as merely ornamental, as signs of nobility, and I would lock myself in the bathroom for long hours, pretending to have problems with my bowels, only to play with that mirror and brush, to gaze at my small face in the broad face of the mirror, to run the heavy brush through my fine hair, to imagine myself a queen of sorts in her queenly toiletry. Sometimes I would let my younger sister in, but she of course would have to be the servant who would brush my hair while I uttered commands in a newly discovered language, my make believe French.

Years later at a downtown bookstore, I heard Lebanese writer Etel Adnan explain how the nuns at the French colonial schools told the students that they must not speak Arabic, that it was an irrational, illogical language, and that French alone is the language of rational thought. I'm

not sure if Sittee believed this. By that time she was not around and so many of her stories had been buried with her. But like so many of the Lebanese who chose to think of themselves as more European than Arab, tracing their descendants to the ancient Phoenicians, and the wonders of the conqueror rather than the conquered, she seemed to overly relish the French language and Jean Nate perfume.

The lemon jasmine was from Lebanon and the Jean Nate from France, and as she stood over me in the kitchen while I pulled the tips and strings from the green beans and washed them, Sittee's fragrance swam around me in the steam from the chicken boiling on the stove. The loose skin on her upper arms jiggled as she kneaded the dough, then rolled it out before my sister and me, and we stood with glasses in hand arguing over who would cut the round forms for the meat pies and who had to fill the forms with lamb and pine nuts, then fold the edges up and press them into perfect triangles. Sittee stuffed *koosah* (zucchini) with lamb and rice while my sister cut tomatoes for *tabouleh* and I chewed on the pine nuts spilled across the kitchen counter. Sittee never told me I would ruin my appetite--this was all part of the process of tasting and testing. In Arabic tradition, where we say you eat as much as you love the cook, every seed, every appetizer counted as part of this love, and we always ate well.

As we stood in the steamy Saturday afternoon kitchen kneading dough and pinching meat pies, I asked Sittee, "Was Lebanon beautiful?"

"Yeeee!" she said, then lapsed into memories and ramblings in Arabic, the only language that could express her country's beauty. Every time I wanted to experience Lebanon, she lapsed into sounds I could not decipher, as if a country cannot be translated to any other language except

that which is native to it. It didn't seem to matter to Sittee that I missed the details of her yearnings in the rise and fall of her voice, but I did understand that this country was beautiful, not in the way the French language was beautiful, but in the way a lone cedar growing out of jagged rock is beautiful. Sittee's clouded eyes watered as she spoke of Lebanon. Something awful, some great apocalypse had destroyed her country. But the way she described the cedars and their dark branches in the evening breeze from the verandah of her mountain villa, I thought surely our family was among the ancient Egyptian pharaohs. We had lost much in coming to this country, but I imagined that Cedars Sinai hospital, which stood in the heart of Los Angeles, was a modest commemoration to my family and the cedar trees that brought Sittee to tears.

When her sister Genvieve came from Douma to Los Angeles to visit, her burnt leather face told once again how Lebanon made everything old. I had never before seen a face so creviced and dried to that prunelike quality of things left too long in the sun. Her gray hair was pulled back from her face and tied in a knot behind her head. Genvieve, though several years younger than Sittee with fair skin and dyed red hair, looked like her sister's mother. As the sisters sat beside each other on the sofa, it was clear that they inhabited different worlds, though they were both born and raised in Douma. Genvieve still lived in this mountain village, but moved between Douma and Paris when the Civil War got troublesome. She had ten children, and when one of her grown sons was shot in the head and killed while crossing the street in Beirut to buy some milk, she came to visit her sister in Los Angeles. But she would return again to Douma. The root for Douma in Arabic means persistence, continuity, perseverance, the three best words I could find to define the women in our family, as Sittee

and Genvieve sat on the couch in the evenings, telling stories in Arabic and running green thread through their leathered fingers, around a crochet hook, the half-made blankets falling over their knees.

Saliba, my grandfather's name, comes from the Orthodox tradition and means "bearers of the cross," a name distinctly Christian. My grandfather was from a not so distant mountain village to the south of Douma, and I imagine my grandparents looked on similar cedar trees in the dry evenings, rustling with cicadas' wings. They met in this country after an exchange of photographs brought them to their wedding day. Sittee was almost forty by then, and my mother insists that her photograph had been finely touched up, particularly around the nose and jowls. But whatever the arranged exchange entailed, I'm sure Sittee felt fortuitous to have such a handsome groom.

My grandfather was photogenic, after all. I knew him only in pictures that Sittee kept by her bedside or stored away in old shoe boxes, but the way Sittee spoke of him, I knew he too was from that noble line of Phoenician kings of Old Country fame, long before cedars were transformed to neon in Los Angeles. Samuel Saliba's ancestors had traveled to China to bring silk worms to the mountains of Lebanon, and these centuries of silk spinning and fine fabrics translated in the new world to a traveling garment salesman, specializing in children's clothes. Sittee said she had never remarried because she did not want to give up the Saliba name. When she said this, she pressed her folded hands to her heart, and wove long stories about my great great grandfather Saliba who was mayor of the village, and during the plague went about burying the dead among his people, until he too caught the disease and died, and how another great

uncle was archbishop of this diocese, and how another was a famous doctor named Moses who invented a cure for a disease I couldn't pronounce.

All this history is written in a book. The introduction to the book says, "History is only a biography on a larger and more exhaustive scale." The book traces the Saliba history back to the 5th century B.C. in ancient Sparta. I studied Sparta in the fourth grade, and we learned that the Spartans were a warlike, fighting people who couldn't defend themselves against the peace-loving and rational Athenians. We are always on the wrong side of history. Except that the Salibas were Christians from the earliest days after Christ, not converts from the Crusades, and this seemed to give us some advantage over pagans and Jews and Muslims, at least according to this book, which claims to contain "no aberrations." After centuries of battles and defending the cross against Judaism and Islam, and spreading Christianity throughout Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon, and after the brothers of a particular line begat sons, and more males begat more males, the Saliba line of the story ends, "Samuel, the fifth son of Moses, begat Ronald (my father) and Gilbert. The said Samuel died in California in 1949." The story tells only the history of men.

Actually, three women appear in the book. One saintly mother, Aghrist, who in the first century A.D. prayed for her son's conversion to Christianity and lived one hundred twenty one years and died with her prayer fulfilled. Another, Akaber, a woman warrior, fought disguised on horseback, killing fourteen Arabs from the south who had invaded northern Syria in 531 A.D. After being captured, she was rescued by her brother who insisted that she had been outnumbered and if the enemy faced her two to one, she could fight all day and never be taken captive. And then there was Mariam, who in 1624 A.D. was espied by the Governor of

Tripoli walking in her garden. Struck by her beauty, the governor instantly proposed marriage to the girl's father, which would mean her necessary conversion to Islam. Her father tacitly agreed to a marriage which would defile the religious purity of his family. But having little power to say "no" to a man of state, he told the governor to return in thirty days, so that he had proper time to prepare the wedding feast. By the time the governor returned with his men, the father had moved his entire family, his livestock, and belongings from his mansion to a newly built house across the mountain pass. He prepared a wedding feast at the old house and with all his servants, greeted the guests, set them at a banquet table, then with his sons and cousins, drew their swords and killed the guests and hid their bodies in the stable. Mariam, I imagine, knew nothing of this chivalrous display to protect her honor and her religion, but wandered through the new gardens of her mansion on the other side of the mountains, dreaming of the handsome governor whose body lay rotting in the stables.

I could not say that Sittee was beautiful like Mariam, and her piety was not the prayerful diligence of Aghrist, for she attended the Orthodox church every Sunday more out of social than religious compunction. But like all women of color who must fight battles on many fronts, she would have to find the strength of Akaber to fight two men at once and never be taken captive. By the time I was old enough to know Sittee, to understand her old world ways and decipher the language of her movements when I couldn't understand her speech, it seemed she had already won or lost all of her battles.

My grandfather's death and absence accorded Sittee an independence and strength I rarely saw in women. She ran her accounts,

invested in property, donated money to charities, and slept alone in a single bed with his picture by her side. When I was young, grandpa was the only person I knew who had died, a man from the Middle East, from the cradle of the sacred religion of Christianity. As I entered the darkness of Sittee's Orthodox church, incense dissipated in white billows, the scent of myrrh lingering. Ritual, death, prayer, Jesus, grandpa, played circles in my head. A man who died on a cross, we came to pray for, he would save us from the sins of this world, the only man I ever knew who had died, a noble man, a man of the cross, we pray to our father. We stood before the flickering candle flames, and Sittee put some money in the box and gave me a new candle to light for grandpa. After I lit the candle and said my prayer, "Our Father," because he is my father's father, I turned to Sittee, "Grandpa is Jesus, right?"

It would not have surprised me from the way Sittee spoke of him if all these people gathered weekly to remember my grandfather. She believed in the nobility of her people and of the past and she believed in its power to diffuse the sense of displacement she felt in this country. Even though she liked to stress that we were Lebanese, not Arab, I knew otherwise. The television news said that Arabs were bad people, terrorists, and sheiks, yet Sittee gave me another picture of our history. But after that day she explained to me that grandpa was not Jesus and that everyone and everything must sometime die.

My father tells a different story of his father's death. The first time I heard it, my father and I were driving down Interstate 99 together in early summer, heading to my sister's wedding. We drove silently past fields of alfalfa and cattle and industrial wasteland, and when we reached Stockton, I noticed my father was crying. "I hate Stockton," he said. "My father died

in Stockton." When my father was sixteen, grandpa traveled to Stockton, as his children's garment business often took him out of town. My father, too, was away for the weekend with his high school buddies up at Lake Arrowhead, drinking beer and water-skiing. At the end of the weekend, they drove down the mountain, back to Los Angeles. As they pulled around the corner, my father noticed the street lined with cars and a black limousine. His mother's face at the door was bleached with tears. "His heart stopped. Three days ago," she said.

He stared beyond his mother at the house full of strangers dressed in black. "Why didn't anyone tell me?" He looked at her. "Why didn't you call me?"

"I didn't want to ruin your weekend."

I pressed the accelerator, trying to leave Stockton behind us. "You know," my father said, "I didn't even know him."

I knew Sittee only in the confused and convoluted ways of a child. As a teenager, I wanted to forget my Arabness and be like everyone else, so I didn't have much time for her. Besides, we had moved to Seattle, and our Saturday afternoons together diminished to brief visits in summertime. I remember how on each visit, she sat on her sofa dressed in black (another friend had passed away, another death of memory) beneath a painting of a shepherd boy leading his flock along a dusty road. It was a picture of an Italian landscape, but Sittee said she bought the painting because it reminded her of home. When she said "home," she always meant Lebanon, or Lebanon as her memory had fixed it in a pastoral painting. I sat beside her beneath that painting playing with the nap of her olive velvet couch, rubbing it the dark way, then the light, as I had done as a child. Back then,

when she noticed me staring at the painting, trying to place her in this landscape of orange rock and olive trees, amongst the sheep crossing a small stone bridge, she pointed up at the one black sheep in the flock, and said, "See, this little black one is you." Then she pulled me to her, and kissed me loudly on the ear with a force that left my ear ringing.

Sittee died when I was twenty. I was attending the university when I heard she was sick and drove a thousand miles to see her. Her air of antiquity that had once left me in awe had decayed. Her gray skin hung loosely on her shrunken frame. The red dye gone, her white wisps of hair faded into the colorless sheets. I sat beside her for hours, clinging to her withered hand, as she moved between wakefulness and sleep, between Los Angeles and Lebanon, while I spun remembrances of Saturday afternoons in the kitchen with her, as if all my talk could keep her with me. And as if in the kitchen ten years ago, I asked again, "What was Lebanon like when you were my age?"

Even Sittee's Arabic lay silent within her as some memory floated past her clouded vision. I wondered what she saw in her faraway thoughts --the cedar branches in the evening wind, her mother kneading dough in the kitchen, mountains rising up out of the Mediterranean on summer days at the beach.

At last she spoke. "Your life isn't worth anything," she confessed to me. "Life isn't worth a thing."

Sometimes I think if I tell these stories enough, I'll understand Sittee's last words to me. When I told my brother what she said about the worthlessness of life, he thought for sure she had said that because I was a woman, because Arab culture rides the value of masculinity with reckless

bravado, and that even Sittee had bought into it. He should know since he was the sole male grandchild and the recipient of all these benefits--as a boy, coffee cans full of pistachio nuts, boxes of color-coated almonds, and in later years, thousands of dollars. But I find his interpretation too simple, because Sittee was a strong woman, and not likely to be beaten down by virtue of her gender no matter what tradition said. I think for her this conclusion may have come from the slow accumulation of loss--of homeland, of husband, of heart.

Sittee trusted too much in the promise of America while living in nostalgia for Lebanon. She believed what she read in the morning paper as she ate sour yogurt. She believed in the nobility of the past, and though she was from a family of endurers, she had a tendency to misjudge her enemies. To her French was beautiful, red hair and white skin were beautiful, and she always told me to stay out of the sun because my olive skin had grown dark as a coffee bean. The Palestinians, she said, had destroyed her homeland. And though I only knew Lebanon from textbooks, I knew that Britain and France had carved up and taken control of the Middle East, then given Palestine to the Jews who drove the Palestinians into Southern Lebanon and neighboring Arab states. So if the PLO had a hand in Lebanon's destruction, Israel, Western Europe, and the U.S. all had at least two hands in Lebanon's Civil War which had ripped Sittee's country into shredded memories of mountain villas and quiet summer evenings on the verandah.

Sittee returned to Lebanon for a visit in 1958. Arab nationalism was at its height, and Eisenhower, concerned with protecting U.S. interests in the region, landed 15,000 Marines in Beirut. Lebanon's president Chamoun tried to align Lebanon with the West against the Arab states, and Sittee

joined in this alliance. She baked sheets of cookies, drove down to the port in Beirut, and distributed them to the U.S. marines. I imagine her with her boxes of *ba'laywah* moving among the blue-suited men, in what she considered a patriotic gesture to her new country, with no sense of contradiction or conflict as she drove back up the hills toward Douma.

Last summer I decided to travel to Lebanon, so my father sent me Sittee's passport and naturalization papers. Because American hostages were being held in Lebanon, the United States still had a ban on its citizens traveling there. But if I could prove I was of Lebanese heritage and purchase a plane ticket through Amman or Cairo, I could somehow circumvent the restrictions. I had filed for a Syrian visa, because although the civil war had ended, Lebanon was now under Syrian control. But my cousins who lived in my grandfather's village of Bteghreen in the mountains above Beirut were having problems with various factions who resented the U.S. turning the other way as Syria took control of Lebanon, and they feared the anti-American sentiment in the wake of the Gulf War might cause problems in my travel plans. "Do not come," they insisted. "Wait until things have settled down here. We can't be responsible for you."

I thought then that I would never see Lebanon, that it would disappear before I had the chance to return. I looked down at Sittee's passport. Too many borders seemed closed. And though I spent the summer instead in the West Bank, just miles from Lebanon, I couldn't enter Sittee's country because Southern Lebanon was under siege from Israel and the borders were closed.

The mountains in northern Palestine must look something like Sittee's village, I thought staring out from another verandah upon a hillside of olive trees, listening to cicadas rustling in the heat of midday. We waited in the dust of the road for a taxi to Jerusalem. When I got in beside an old man, his burnt leather face framed by a black and white *kaffiyeh*, he smiled pleasantly sensing our foreignness. "Hello," my friend said in Arabic, "we're from America." The man turned to me, noticing my Arabness, as if to say, "you too?" "I speak a little Arabic," I said, as I prefaced everything on this trip, "My grandparents are from Lebanon." "Yee, *Lubnan*," he said, pressing his leathered hand to my cheek. "*Lubnan*, *Lubnan*," he shook his head and his eyes began to water. We sat staring into each other's faces in silent recognition of loss, as we drove past the corrugated steel of the refugee camps, past the Israeli military camps, and I had a sense then why Sittee's eyes always watered when she spoke of Lebanon.

When I got my first job teaching high school in the inner-city, my mother took me to a local department store and bought me several outfits to wear. When I returned home, I spread them out before my father for his approval. He looked up at me over the top of his wire-rimmed glasses and said, "You're young. Why do you want to wear all these dark clothes for? You'll look like those old ladies from the Old Country."

I gathered up the clothes, draped them over my arm, and stood before my father, thinking of my aunts and great aunts who gathered in Sittee's kitchen to roll grape leaves as their Arabic words bounced back and forth across the table, their fingers as busy as their mouths. Their dark

clothes had not struck me then, but I think now, perhaps they had inherited a history of mourning.

Sittee appears to me now at night standing beneath a lamppost, her shadow spreading up the stairs of my apartment building. I walk down the steps toward her, calling her name. She motions to me to follow and together we glide along the sidewalk, my fingers reaching for the fringes of her crocheted shawl fluttering in the night wind. She is taking me somewhere, I don't know where. As we wind our way through the deserted alleyways of the bazaar, past tables of jewelry, perfume, and ceramics, past shops without vendors, I reach for her hand and we stand together beneath the domed archway of the night, speaking Arabic, her language I have come to know.

Chapter 6: Across Generations: Arab American Women's Writing

How many Arabian generations descend to myself and my sisters? There is Palestinian blood in my ancestry: their memory is one part of my inheritance, as are the swords of the Muslim nation.

So I study the words of Arabs, and celebrate their lives as cousins, brothers, aunts, and uncle.

--Diana Abu-Jaber, "On Reading Difference"

Reclaiming that from which one has been disinherited is a good thing . . . Yet claiming for myself a heritage the weft of whose genesis is my own disinheritance is a profoundly troubling paradox.

--Patricia J. Williams, "On Being the Object of Property"

The constituency of "the ethnic" occupies quite literally a "pre-post"-erous space where it has to actualize, enfranchise, and empower its own "identity" and coextensively engage in the deconstruction of the very logic of "identity" and its binary and exclusionary politics.

--R. Radhakrishnan, "Ethnic Identity and Post-Structuralist Differance"

Remember who you are, you told me, Father. Jean recalls his dead father's words upon his return to Lebanon in Elmaz Abinader's autobiographical novel Children of the Roojme: A Family's Journey. Until recently, Arab Americans have had mostly family stories, but very little literature to remember themselves by. Certainly, I remember as a child my grandmother, Sittee, reading to me from Kahlil Gibran, the poet who forged a mystical connection between the "old country" and the new, as I was taught to call them. Gibran was a cultural hero to many who celebrated Arab American identity through his literature; but within American culture, there remains a dearth of positive cultural signifiers for people of Arab heritage.

We are another "Other." During the 1990 census, posters with pictures of Danny Thomas, Edward Said, Jamie Farr, and other Arab Americans reminded us to check "Other" and sign in as Arab American on our census forms. In 1991, the Persian Gulf War and the war against Arab Americans at home sent Arab Americans a more grave reminder that we need to remember who we are. We need others to know who we are. Yet, there remains a general absence of Arab American writers in multicultural readers and of Arab American women in anthologies of women of color. Evelyn Shakir attributes the silence of Arab American literature to the "fact that Arab Americans as a group have often been viewed with deep suspicion, if not hostility," and thus many Arab Americans have chosen to maintain a "low ethnic profile" ("Starting Anew" 24). The persistence of negative stereotyping of Arabs in the United States which coincides with Western neocolonialist interests in the Middle East, produces simultaneously among Arab Americans a disinheritance from their Arab past as well as a "strategic essentialism" (Spivak) of ethnic identity, and a reassertion of Arab cultural values. The problem of theorizing about Arab American literature, then, is inextricable from the ambivalences that surround Arab American identities, as the ethnic subject seeks to "empower its own 'identity' while deconstructing the 'logic of identity'" (Radhakrishnan 199), a logic that has excluded Arab Americans both from mainstream and marginalized groups.

Arab Identity and the Logic of Irrationality

The "logic" of Arab identity, particularly that produced by European Orientalists of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, and by contemporary western journalists and scholars, is soundly attacked by

Edward Said in Orientalism, as well as in chapters one and three of this dissertation. Said defines "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3) as well as a means of strengthening European identity by creating the Arab world as a "negative specular image" of itself. Articles on "the Arab mind" and character written during the Gulf War reinforced nineteenth-century Orientalist stereotypes of Arabs as obsessive beings incapable of rational thought. These articles, which passed for political analysis, perpetrated a mythological hierarchical distinction between the Arab East and the West much like that presented in Macdonald's The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam (1909):

The essential difference in the Oriental mind is not credulity as to unseen things, but inability to construct a system as to seen things. . . *Inability* , then, to see life steadily, and see it whole, to understand that a theory of life must cover all facts, and *liability* to be stampeded by a single idea and blinded to everything else--therein, I believe, is the difference between the East and the West. (qtd. in Orientalism 277)

This perceived inability of Arabs to see life "whole," their alleged narrowness of vision, promoted Western Orientalists' claims that the West alone possessed the capability to see the Arab world as a whole, in its entirety, and of course, objectively, Macdonald's obviously racist assertion of Western "objectivity" as the universalizing vision has been outmoded by contemporary deconstructionist readings of subjectivity and history which argue for "partial" and "situated knowledges" (Harroway). Yet, arguments of Arabs' obsessive, irrational thinking resurfaced repeatedly during the Gulf Crisis and War. The persistence of such stereotypes reminds us that

while the academy may have theoretically deconstructed universalizing claims of Western so-called "rational thought" and discarded readings of a universalizing subjectivity and history, for the vast majority of the U.S. public who supported the Gulf War, such centers of authority hold fast. Arab American subjectivity cannot be entirely removed from this context of Western reductionism of the Arabs and the Arab world; and it is against this backdrop of racist logic that Arab American literature emerges, subverting this logic.

Self, Family, Community and Resistance

Among Arab American writers, wholeness of the self, of subjectivity and history is constantly thrown into question, as the "self" is not the "individual" of Western philosophical making, but a traveler, a transitory being connected to family and the greater community. This movement occurs sometimes in defiance of the bounds of time and space, across generations and geo-political boundaries, as the traveler seeks to reclaim the disenfranchised parts of the "self," while simultaneously (and perhaps paradoxically) recognizing multiplicity as a passage to wholeness. This tradition of Arab thought as nomadic and other-oriented is evident in how Arab Americans situate themselves in the world, and how they choose to represent themselves and the heterogeneity of their ethnic experiences.

Although "self" is not a popular term in postmodern criticism which has deconstructed the "centered self," for writers of Arab heritage, Greg Orfelea has argued, "the family is self" (Grape Leaves xix). The notion of "self" may be understood as a "reference to an imaginary singularity" (Smith 6), generally conceived of as a unity, and therefore ideologically inscribed. This "imaginary singularity" may be extended to essentialist

notions of ethnic identity, or the "imagined community," which serves in many ways as a strategic reference of unity. Orfelea's equation of "family" with "self," however, already challenges the unity of self or individual, and suggests a multiplicity of subjectivities, dependent on relations with like "others." In the context of women's writing, the equation of the ethnic, gendered "self" with the family is complicated by traditional concepts of the familial structures within Arab culture which tend to reinforce the family's hierarchical authority wherein women hold the mythic status as the bearers of culture. "Such mythologization traps women within a static representational structure, so that attempts to alter traditional roles are frequently seen as attempts to subvert ethnicity itself--an accusation which takes on particular potency when ethnic identity is fragile or contested" (Majaj 14). Arab American women's writing, therefore, subverts Orientalist stereotypes of Arab identities, and simultaneously rewrites traditional concepts of the family to allow for cultural representations of Arab (American) women's subjectivity which embrace the familial and communal sense of self, the "multitudinous," multiplicitous self, even as it resists the restraints of tradition.

In theorizing Arab American subjectivities, I will show how Arab American women writers negotiate often complex and contradictory ethnic, gender, and class identities which extend across generations of family as well as across cultural boundaries. Contrary to popular Western stereotypes of sexist Arab men and veiled, oppressed women, this writing is not foremost concerned with "the dichotomies of gender warfare" (Gagnier 13), but with the strengths and sufferings of both women and men as they celebrate cultural traditions and attempt to grapple with anti-Arab racism in this country, their war-ravaged ancestry, and the effects of imperialist

policies on their ancestral lands. The writings of Arab American women, including Elmaz Abinader's novel Children of Roojme (1991) and Hala Deeb Jabbour's Woman of Nazareth (1989) as well as the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye, D.H. Melhem, and Etel Adnan, express subjectivities that break down boundaries between self and family, personal and political, and move towards a "generational" and international understanding of ethnic subjects within North American culture.

In Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins describes the three levels on which "people experience and resist oppression": "the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural content created by race, class, and gender; and the systematic level of social institutions" (227). These levels also mirror the ways ethnic identity may be celebrated: among family, community, and in relation to social institutions, such as nationalist movements. Although these Arab American women writers traverse all three levels of experience and resistance, individual writers tend to feel more at "home" at specific levels, often depending on their generational relationship to their homeland and its political struggles. The "generational" power of writing, that act of self-invention and self-preservation, constructs a "generational" subjectivity represented not merely by the many generations of family members who symbolize a reinheritance from fragmented histories, but also by the writer's "generational" relationship to her ancestral Arab land. That is to say, the literature of Arab American writers is influenced by the community which circumscribes their writing, as well as by the writer's position within that family or "community" as a first-, second-, or third-generation Arab American. These three modes of "generation" define the subject in relation to "self"-empowerment, to family and community, and to

an ancestral homeland. For example, second generation writers like Abinader, Nye, and Melhem tend to embrace personal biography and community content as modes of experience and resistance, whereby family and community come to represent and replace that often severed connection with the homeland. First generation writers like Jabbour and Adnan, in contrast, are much more likely to direct their writings in resistance to the corrupt political systems which led to their displacement. Yet throughout their works, personal biography intertwines with communal concerns to address systematic modes of oppression and resistance.

From Lebanon to the U.S.: Generational Return and Rebirth

Elmaz Abinader's Children of the Roojme (1991) operates on the level of personal biography as it recalls the power of storytelling and poetry within Arab tradition. In her prologue entitled "The poetry of men," Abinader describes the *roojme* as a stone promontory where men gathered to share stories: "Someone would start a poem about the harvest, asking God, in rhyme, for figs the size of his fist. Another celebrated the sea; others glorified a woman's beauty or praised God. Eventually a word would trigger a song, and the men's voices bounced in the canyon" (3). In response to this much celebrated poetic tradition, her novel echoes back with the poetry of women. Perhaps in accordance with the homosocial ordering of Arab society, which encourages social relations among members of the same sex, the novel is divided along gender lines in two sections: "Fathers and Sons" and "Mothers and Daughters." Tracing the Abinader family journey through both paternal and maternal lines, the novel describes the historical effects of Ottoman rule, the Spanish Flu, the

abandonment of French colonial rule in Lebanon during World War I, the ensuing famine,¹ the flight to America, and generational death and birth through four generations.

The male journey of father and son, is one of return--from the rubber plantations of Brazil, from the promise of America, from mountain hideaways during the Turkish invasion, to Lebanon with its "limestone roads, terraced hillsides, . . . bleached hotels . . . The hills and the sea, the earth and the sky; nothing interrupts these natural links" (18). The novel, though characteristically postmodern in its structure and multiple perspectives, maintains these "natural links" through continuity, moving back and forth in time and between generations that might have coexisted in the hills of Lebanon had time allowed. When Jean returns from Lebanon after a 36 year absence, he talks with his dead father in the orchard, repeating "This is what it is like to return" (11) and grieving his "best years away from home" (38). For the men in Part I, "home" is marked as "place," the hills of Lebanon, thus the section ends with Jean getting out of a taxi as a young man in 1935, and the driver says, "Jean, you are home" (140). Jean hears his dead father's voice, the whistling of a Brazilian flute, he sees his fiancée waving to him in the road as he approaches his family's house. This "return" as a young man becomes part of the refrain of return that echoes throughout the novel, as memories return, old men return to find changes and sameness, and the ambivalent burden and lightness of home.

Part Two of Abinader's novel opens with Mayme sitting in solitude, quiet, and hunger, trying to protect her two daughters from the Spanish flu which has devastated their village of Abdelli. Mayme, who had been barren for 18 years and finally bears two daughters, preservers against a

tradition that places high value on the birth of sons, and her endurance and commitment to preserving her daughters' lives attests to the strength of women. But if her position is one of relative impotence², her daughter Camille, Abinader's mother, reveals what might be considered a feminist consciousness that counters both Western and Arab assumptions about women. Working as a clerk in her family store in the U.S., Camille ponders her position as a woman: "She wasn't quite sure what it meant to be a clerk in Chaucer's time, but she knew that it was not a job for women. All the clerk's she knew were women, and she was the main one at Nader's Dry Goods" (223). On the night of her marriage to Jean back in Lebanon, she refuses to follow the custom of hanging her bloodied wedding sheet out the window, and when the town mutters accusations that she might be an "unclean" bride, she tells her mother, "I am tired of caring what they think" (241).

For Abinader, it is the women who see through the contradictions of their existences most clearly. When Jean tells Camille of their life in the U.S., saying, "In many ways we are both citizens and foreigners" (238), she asks, "Do you feel you belong more in one place than the other?" (238) and suggests that she feels more at home in America, because there "she could walk away from the house and away from the family's eyes" (239). On one hand, the conditions of life in the U.S. proved more liberating for women who experienced freedom from family ties as the tightly knit family networks of old country villages necessary for survival in Lebanon began to breakdown and women often participated, alongside men, in new family businesses. On the other hand, the U.S. promised family stability and freedom from the hardships of war and famine which forced Lebanese people to "choose between their husbands and children or their parents

and their country" (198). These difficult decisions that plagued their ancestors are resolved by following generations in a sense of personal and familial wholeness in the "new world." In the United States, Camille's sister muses over what makes a house last, as she thinks back on the family house in Lebanon:

How long did we have it? Live in it? As if we hadn't learned from Nagy and Elia, our grandparents, whose house was demolished, whose hearts were shredded by the armies marching through. What makes a house last, Father? (253)

This house will last. she says of her home in Pennsylvania. Yet what is lasting throughout the generations is not the permanency of place or even stone structures, but that of family. The women's section ends not with return but with rebirth, as Camille's son Roji (hope) dies, and another, Jean Jr., named for his father, is born. The permanency of family has replaced the permanency of place as the voices of women join the voices of men, yet the continuity across generations remains a paternal line.

Although Children of the Roojme is an autobiographical novel, Abinader herself appears only in the prologue describing her own visit to Lebanon in 1973, and her family huddled inside a shelter her father had built on the *roojme*. In Arabic, the *roojme* is an elevated rock pile that extends from the hillside offering a view into the distance, but *roojme* also means tombstone, an ambivalence that connects vision and death, much as the writer's vision transcends generations, bringing the dead to life. The *roojme* comes to symbolize the rootedness of ancestry, as Abinader writes, "What I stood on, this pile of rocks, was my foundation" (5). Abinader's otherwise absence within the novel confirms Orfelea's statement that "for writers of Arab heritage, family is self" (Grapeleaves xix), and the history of

four generations composes a self as multiple as the many subject positions of family members whose stories "make up [their] familial and communal history" (Majaj 20).

For Abinader, personal biography is necessarily familial and communal; however, her poem "Letters from Home," dedicated to her father, suggests another outcome for the immigrant family living under the conditions of modern U.S. life:

. . . Your own children seem like nomads.
 They sit in scattered apartments where you can't
 see your three daughter gazing from their windows.
 Or your three sons pacing the old wood of their rooms,
 yet you write to your mother, they still pray. (286)

The connection between three generations of family begins to break down with successive generations, as the father writes to his mother across the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and the poet writes to her father from the isolation of her apartment. Yet over three generations, it is the "generational" act of writing, in both Arabic and English, that holds the family together, translating experience across generations.

A Palestinian Woman: Retrieving History, Revising Tradition

Abinader's Children of the Roojme (1991) functions as an elegy to past generations, and as a promise to carry on the positive cultural traditions through the family line, as her writing retrieves the lost history of her Lebanese family. Similarly, Hala Deeb Jabbour's A Woman of Nazareth (1989) seeks to rewrite the much maligned and misrepresented history of the Palestinians for a Western audience. The two titles of the novels suggest the authors' approaches: Abinader is concerned with the *generational* struggle

that is represented by the roojme, the place of vision and death; Jabbour is concerned with *women's* struggle as it is tied with Nazareth, both an historical homeland for Palestinians and a symbol of hope in Christian religion. "The same village that had begat the Son of Nazareth" (27), begets Jabbour's protagonist, Amal, or hope in Arabic. In contrast to the son of Nazareth, Amal must fight against gender oppression as she becomes wedded to various causes: liberation from enslaving Arab tradition, her literal marriage to a Saudi prince, and the revolution for Palestinian self-determination, in her progressive coming to consciousness of the effects of gender, class, and race oppression.

The vastness of Amal's experience, though implausible in a realist sense, elevates her to the mythological or universal level. The novel opens with an Afrocentric, patriarchal myth of creation that traces Arab roots to Africa and to Amal's "anthropological grandfather," Kenya. Kenya marries Nubia, and after centuries of peaceful existence, their offspring yearn "for new, unknown, more exciting and more challenging frontiers" (16), branching out in all directions and into the "Lands of Arabia" (17). Jabbour describes the anthropological daughter, the Arab woman, as Jewish, Christian, and Muslim, the "daughter of Sara, Mary and Khadije" (18), caught in the complex web of history, enslaved by centuries of cultural and political repression:

And in me lies the history, a geography, a psychology, . . . in a complex, intricate, passionate, complicated character, that is only at this end of the twentieth century emerging as a crying, pleading, leaping, rebellious individual, trying to break loose from the stagnation, from all the aspects of my traditions and my culture that have enslaved me, castrated me, from a political and

religious landscape that has throttled my growth, chained my freedom and suffocated my spirit . . . I am Amal, the Arab woman.

(18)

Amal, a woman who is both singular and multiple, striving "to cure [her] schizophrenia, [her] three faces of Eve, and become one, united, peaceful women" (19) becomes symbolic of the collective struggle of Palestinian women. The infiltration of American cultural icons in the novel--in this case, Joanne Woodward's "Three Faces of Eve,"--reveals the hybridization of Arab/American/woman's experience. Because of this, the novel cannot be read exclusively as "third world literature;" yet Amal's story takes on the significance of what Frederic Jameson has described in his essay "Third-World literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," as "national allegory," characteristic of third world literature.

Jameson distinguishes third world literature from its Western counterpart, claiming, "All third-world texts are necessarily allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories* . . . particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" (69). Jameson explains the Western reader's resistance to such texts, for their own literature functions on the private, psychologized, libidinal level, so that they tend to perceive the political element in literature as Stendhal describes it, "a pistol shot in the middle of a concert" (69). According to Jameson's formula, the collective Other is so different from, is in fact, the very opposite of the Western individual, who is inclined to read these foreign narratives as "conventional and naive. . . [with] a freshness of information and social interest that we cannot share" (66). Jameson's argument reduces both "third world literature" and the "western reader" to

simple, monolithic formulas. His assertion that the individual always represents the collective, the *national*, is as much false as it is true. Certainly there exist many modes of narratives within that vast territory known as third world. Furthermore, although the West (or at least Jameson) may perceive this "world" as "always and everywhere" constituted by its relationship to Western imperialism, the third world would hardly confine itself to such classifications which limits its agency to a reactionary position.

In his response to Jameson, Aijaz Ahmad points out that Jameson's theory is grounded in a binary opposition between the first and third worlds and reinscribes colonizing tactics used to justify the dehumanization of the "colonized" through first world perceptions of the othered individual as irreducibly representative of his or her race or culture. Aijaz also asserts that "the bifurcation of the public and the private and the necessity to re-constitute that relation where it has been broken, is indeed a major preoccupation of first-world women writers today, on both sides of the Atlantic" (24). To this point, I would also add the many third world feminists, and those like Jabbour who straddle both worlds, are working to break down binary oppositions within their work and move towards an understanding of heterogeneity within and across cultures.

Despite the obvious flaws in Jameson's argument, I invoke his theory here to show how Jabbour, in effect, allegorizes Amal and her story, and engages in didactic historical explications of the Arab-Israeli conflict to educate an assumed Western reader. Yet, Jabbour's writing complicates the nationalist paradigm with feminist sensibilities, at once feminizing the struggle and deconstructing the patriarchal politics of nationalism. Amal's

dispossession and disinheritance, "dispersion and exile, obviously contributed to her willingness to challenge traditional mores" (Rubenburg 13). Physical displacement enabled a kind of dispersion of identity for women within traditional societies that impelled the regendering of social formations. However, it would be a mistake to equate Amal's exile, and that of the Palestinians in general, with what Said calls "the ascetic code of willed homelessness" which leads to a greater love of the world, or with Woolf's rejection of national loyalties, or even with the concept of "nomadism" popular amongst some postmodern critics like Deleuze and Guatarri, for her exile is not "willed," but rather imperialistically created and militarily enforced (Said, "Secular Criticism" 7).

Amal struggles for hope and self-determination against what the narrator describes as a double conspiracy: the "social conspiracy" against women, compounded by "another conspiracy of the land . . . neither more or less dangerous than the other" (29). Israel's erasure of Palestine from the world maps, the expectation of Palestinians to be voiceless and submissive, coincides with the expectations of women within Arab society, the two battles Amal fights on different fronts. In linking "the possibilities for feminist action to the necessity of political action" (Majaj 17), the novel reveals how the gender battle manifests itself differently across generations. In Abinader's novel, the rebellious daughter challenges her submissive mother; yet in A Woman of Nazareth, Amal not only breaks from enslaving cultural traditions, she also becomes a revolutionary, and at the same time, returns to her family and embraces the struggle of the larger family of Palestinians, thereby refusing, and openly resisting, the disjuncture of family and place created by the conditions of Israeli occupation.

Despite Palestinian dispossession from their land, Palestinian identity is carried on through the family, which is at once "beautiful" and "claustrophobic" (91). After 1948, Amal's family is driven out of Nazareth by Israeli militia, and they become refugees in Southern Lebanon. Her father, embittered by the loss of his country and land, clings fanatically to religion and traditions which reinforced the subjugation of women (37). When Amal leaves the refugee camp for Beirut and training as a flight attendant, her father disowns her, equating her loss with his dispossession from his homeland, as Amal's mother explains: "The day your letter arrived stating what you had done, he felt as if someone had killed Nazareth for him, killed his dreams of going back one day, dreams that you epitomized" (142). The irony of this symbolic equation is that Amal's liberation as a woman destroys her father's hope for the liberation of his homeland. In other words, within patriarchal ideology these two agendas--the liberation of women and homeland--are necessarily incompatible within a framework which invests traditional gender roles "with ethnic and national significance" (Majaj 17). Amal struggles to reconcile the two, and finally returns to her family, to her mother and sisters, but not to her father. Her teacher and friend Amira reminds her of the importance of family as a support system especially "when that person is an uprooted, psychologically scarred and morally abused entity" (49). Family, and by extension, the refugee camps, served as systems of solidarity and resistance against outside forces--namely Israeli forces--set on destroying Palestinian existence and identity.

While Amal is critical of patriarchal Arab culture, "male dominancy, whims, betrayals and degrading attitudes as well as impositions upon [women] of total servility" (66), she simultaneously allies herself with

Palestinian men who are themselves the victims of Israeli and Western domination. As bell hooks has written, "One sees that since male power within patriarchy is relative, men from poorer groups and men of color are not able to reap the material and social rewards for their participation in patriarchy" (*Yearning* 63). The racist assumption that Western patriarchy is somehow more benevolent to women than Arab patriarchy reinscribes the colonial fantasy of "white men saving brown women from brown men," even as it reinforces those cultural values that are most oppressive to women. Imperialist politics places both men and women of color into the category of subjects. Criticizing Western support of the Israeli state, Amira says, "The so-called empires of the West are still living in colonial fantasies in spite of their having relinquished their actual presence on our soil. To them, Arabs are still the subjects and they are the masters" (52). Amal's positions of resistance shift constantly between these points of resistance to her imperialist and patriarchal "masters."

Amal's generation is a transitory one, and her uprootedness allows her the flexibility to reposition herself in relation to various race, class, and gender oppressions. She leaves her family to liberate herself as a woman; when she finds love, she marries a Saudi prince and struggles (though inadequately) with her newly attained economic privilege. When they divorce because of social strictures, Amal commits herself to the revolution, and later falls in love with a revolutionary, but becomes uncomfortable with the violence, and turns to working in a hospital for child victims of the occupation and wars. After her entire family is killed in a massacre at Tal al-Zaatar, she is on the verge of a nervous breakdown, along with three-quarters of the city of Beirut. Yet her recovery attests to Palestinian resilience, and she returns to Beirut from New York, pregnant, to marry her

lover, Salah. Amal's story, the story of hope, ends with both return and rebirth--"return" to a homeland that is actually her place of exile, Beirut; and "rebirth" of an illegitimate child conceived outside of marriage. Her pregnancy confirms for Amal her desire for marriage, but only on the grounds that she maintain her liberty she has worked so hard to earn. Thus A Woman of Nazareth rewrites traditional notions of "return" and "rebirth," as they appear within the patriarchal framework of Abinader's Children of the Roojme, in resistance to imperialist and patriarchal control.

Although Amal attains the unity of her schizophrenic selves, politically she is divided from her symbolic sister selves. In an epilogue which recaptures the mythic tone of prologue, Amal writes a letter to Leah, her contemporary Israeli sister, an appeal to solidarity as women in opposition to all forms of oppression. "I have cried for all the children of war," she writes, "the Lebanese, the Palestinians, the Israelis, the Irish, the Nicaraguans and those of El Salvador" (270). Her final appeal to equality, humanity and justice suggests that feminist strategies must be employed to break the cycle of sorrow and to ensure the ultimate "return" to a Palestinian homeland, a divide that can only be healed by a radical change in her political situation.

The Poetry of Women

Contemporary prose writings by Arab American women attempt through storytelling to reclaim lost histories, and in doing so represent the multiplicity of Arab and Arab American experience. Although Jabbour's feminist, anti-imperialist politics are significantly more overt than Abinader's, both writers represent women's strength and oppression within the complexity of familial and political relations in the U.S. and in the Arab

world. Arab American women poets have also expressed a concern with what Naomi Shihab Nye calls the "gravities of ancestry" (*Grapeleaves* 266). Nye, who is one generation removed from the political struggle of her Palestinian father, asserts that her biculturalism (her mother is Anglo American) helped her maintain some sense of "otherness" or detachment (266), even as bicultural writers engage in building bridges between worlds. Nye's poetry extends from the personal/familial level to communal and more blatantly political concerns, yet her political poetry is "quite muted, unfrontational" (Orfelea, "Doomed by Our Blood to Care" 62). According to Orfelea, she is "the outstanding American poet of Palestinian origin, and one of the premier voices of her generation" (56); yet the fact that fewer than 9% of her poems have recognizably Arab or Palestinian content attests to the ambivalence of Arab American subjectivity: How and in what contexts do Arab Americans express themselves as decidedly ethnic? And when do they project a subjectivity that is not ethnically inscribed?

Her poem, "The Whole Self" plays on the "Hokey Pokey" song, rewriting the American folk tradition and expressing a postmodern sensibility of the tensions between multiplicity and wholeness:

When I think of the long history of the self
 on its journey to becoming the whole self, I get tired.
 It was the kind of trip you keep making . . .

. . . Give me back my villages, I moaned,
 the ability to touch and remove the hand
 without losing anything.

Take me off this mountain where six countries are visible at
once.

I want to remember what it felt like, loving by inches.

You put in the whole self--I'll keep with the toe . . .

(268-9)

For the speaker in Nye's poem the "whole self" is elusive, tedious, fragile, a "self" insistent on partial participation in this dance of life. "My villages" may allude to her family's West Bank villages, as may the mountain where six countries are visible at once. The speaker's refusal to "put the whole self in" suggests the detachment of "otherness" that Nye describes as the result of her biculturalism, but it also symbolizes an ambivalent relationship between community and the self. When the speaker does finally put her whole self into the dance, she experiences a "self" maintained by and for the "other," a communal self which offers both release and fragmentation:

. . . The whole self was a current, a fragile cargo,
a raft someone was paddling through the jungle,
and I was there, waving, and I would be there at the other end.

(269)

The whole self is both current and cargo, the raft of community that keeps the self afloat, the pulse Nye describes that connects worlds, the pulsing of human blood. In her poem "Blood," Nye explores her Arabness and the various ways Arab Americans experience ethnicity: through her father's anecdotes, "A true Arab knows how to catch a fly in his hands;" through the eyes of another--"Years before, a girl knocked,/wanted to see the Arab./I said we didn't have one;" and finally through political events, the headlines that bear the news of the Sabra and Shatila massacre during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon:

Today the headlines clot in my blood.

A little Palestinian dangles a truck on the front page . . .

I call my father, we talk around the news.

It is too much for him,

neither of his two languages can reach it.

I drive into the country to find sheep, cows,

to plead with the air:

Who calls anyone *civilized*?

Where can the crying heart graze?

What does a true Arab do now? (273)

Arab authenticity, the true Arab, like that elusive whole self, shatters in the face of a tragedy that is "too big for us"--the massacre of a thousand civilians by Israeli-backed Lebanese militia, Arabs killing Arabs. The speaker's response is one of confused identity in the face of incredible suffering and feelings of impotence. Returning to the pastoral scenes of her ancestry, she questions the label "civilized," echoing the speechlessness of her father in the poets' attempt to find words for the immensity of destruction and human suffering.

Nye also addresses the inadequacy of language to explain the conditions of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation in "Lunch in Nablus City Park":

When you lunch in a town which has recently known war

under a calm slate sky mirroring none of it,

certain words feel impossible in the mouth.

Casualty: too casual, it must be changed. . .

When the woman across from you whispers
 I don't think we can take it anymore
 and you say there are people praying for her
 in the mountains of Himalaya and she says,
 Lady, it is not enough, then what? (273)

In the face of these conditions, the word "casualty" is too casual, and yet the answers are as faraway and flighty as prayers in the Himalayas. "How can there be war and the next day eating" the speaker questions, as she describes the people around her grieving, planning protests, "toasting one another in languages of grace" in the environs of this park, which itself represents the hope for peace. Interestingly, the point of subjectivity in this poem has shifted to "you"; the "I's" are the Palestinians who say, "I don't think we can take it anymore," or "I will not marry till there is true love" as they discuss politics and love in the park. But the main subject, the "you" is both "other" in this context, and the collective you of women who respond to the grief by acts of solidarity, mourning, and hopes for love:

For you who came so far;
 For you who held out, wearing a black scarf
 to signify grief;
 For you who believe true love can find you
 amidst this atlas of tears linking one town
 to its memory of mortar . . . (274)

The communal "you" in the poem represents the intersubjectivity attained through deep introspection and connection with the communal cause. Similarly, D.H. Melhelm writes of her poet mother in Rest in Love:

In your multitudinous self
 there was no self
 but the poet composed
 for others . . .(112)

For Melhem, her mother represents this self of many parts that contains the "multitudes" in its constant relation to others. This concept of the "multitudinous self" stands in contrast to a tradition of American poetry which "most often presents the individual in isolation."³ "The poet composed for others" signifies both composition, or writing for an audience, a community, as well as the act of self-composition, self-(re)presentation that regards others more than the self, that regenerates life through others. Yet Melhem also expresses an ambivalence toward this "multitudinous self" as a mark of "ethnic identity which has the capacity to consume the female self" (Majaj 16) as she writes elsewhere in Rest in Love , "you died of goodness that disease/ affecting primarily females" (92). Her mother's death conjures a sense of alienation from a past that offered a wholeness elusive to the contemporary poet:

Tonight I ate from my childhood
 lamb and chick peas and yoghurt
 gulping it hot
 as I sat alone in the kitchen
 gorging on my own dead flesh,
 it seemed
 Nobody came back. Not one word
 of Arabic. Only my spoon
 tapping my plate.
 And the hot food poured into me

a bonfire of recollections
and my eyes burned with all
the deadly heat of it
as I foolishly expected
to enjoy my reminiscence
privately, whole. (113)

Melhem's attempts to nourish herself, to relieve her grief through the ethnic food which symbolizes her connection to her mother, becomes a "self-consuming" activity as she gorges "on [her] own dead flesh." The tensions between the consumption of female identity within the Arab community, and the narrator's attempt to find wholeness in isolation are only partially resolved in the awareness that the private self cannot enjoy wholeness; for it is in community, even in a communal memory of language and people, that wholeness is experienced.

Melhem's multiethnic ancestry of Syrian, Serbian, and Siberian informs her own work. As a "citizen of the world" (104), she writes of the political responsibility that underlies ethnicity: "Since ethnic aspects mirror economic and political forces, to be ethnic in a political void is an unaffordable luxury" (104). Melhem's political commitment to the exploited poor both in this country and in the Third World is reflected in the titles of her poems: "Lamentation after Jeremiah to Exorcise high rental/high rise building scheduled for construction with public funds" and "To an Ethiopian Child." The starving child flickering on the television screen signifies the incongruity between modern communication networks and Third World exploitation, the barrier between the speaker, the subject, and the community of suffering, even as Melhem's poems attempt to break down such boundaries.

Like Melhem, Etel Adnan critiques social institutions which create oppressive structures, insisting that "the divine [the subject of poetry] is the people-who-suffer" (90-1). Adnan's poetry, however, seethes with political vigor, perhaps because she grew up in Lebanon and more immediately experienced the political turmoil she attributes to internal corruption and Western imperialism. Adnan draws connections between Arabs and Americans, describing both as "nomadic," "restless and reckless" people (86); yet she condemns capitalist American society which "lives under thick clouds of advertisings, and [buries] the metaphysical insecurity which makes great poetry under a thick cloud of government-induced and market-induced and doctor-induced insecurity" (86). An outspoken cultural critic, Adnan is far less concerned with personal biography in her writing than with denouncing oppressive systems both within the United States and in the Arab world.

Adnan's "Beirut-Hell Express" begins, "The human race is going to the cemetery/in great upheavals," and extends the metaphor of familial (re)generation to the resurrection of Lebanon, the country of her birth. This poem, written in 1970, alludes to the unreal city of T.S. Eliot's Wasteland and foretells the ruin of Lebanon's Civil War which began in 1975. The prophetic voice of the speaker decries all forms of oppression and equates the fate of the Lebanese with that of the American Indian:

Our fate is the one
of the Red Indian: the oiliferous
hordes are going to destroy the very
banks they built as numerous as chimneys

we have mornings with no memories

The erasure of memory, of a personal history, of presence is one of the many tactics that Western imperialism has used to render Arab, as well as other third world peoples, non-existent.⁴ Adnan's prophetic vision of "the Apocalypse of the Oil" forebodes not merely the Lebanese Civil War, but also the Persian Gulf War which became the Arab crisis of imperialist intervention for oil and economic interests. The poem's speaker calls to the people of Beirut to "(take your vertebrae and squeeze out/colonialism like pus)/so that there be air/ so that there be water/ so that there be earth/ so that there be fire" (98). These apocalyptic images signal revolution in response to government corruption. The "I" of Adnan's poems is the voice of prophecy, the critical yet transcendent "I," condemning the modern alienation of capitalist domination which has turned "everything . . . upside down" and disrupted the order of nature.

Regenerative Forces and Solidarities

In Adnan's Journey to Mt. Tamalpais, the Mountain, like the hills of Lebanon or Abinader's *roojme*, represents innocence, wholeness, identity, continuity:

. . .Through the long night of the species we go on, somehow
blindly, and we give a name to our need for a breakthrough: we
call it the Angel, or call it Art, or call it the Mountain (100).

For Arab American women writers, the regenerative power of nature, of family, of community signify wholeness and resistance against fragmented histories. Nye praises this generational impulse in the face of suffering and death in "For Lost and Found Brothers" :

we move forward,
confident we were born into a large family,

our brothers cover the earth. (278)

"Confident we were born into a large family" these writers extend their vision beyond their immediate ancestry and ethnicity to the larger family, specifically to the "people-who-suffer" whether they be Palestinians, Lebanese, Native Americans, the inner-city poor, a starving Ethiopian child.

I think we are Arab American by the ancestors who bless and haunt us, the wars and famine that scattered our families, the sound of a language we half-know in our sleep and carry in our dreams, but also by the mutability of our identity as another "other" which has given us the opportunity to identify with "others" whose ethnic profiles are more dominant within American culture. It is not surprising, then, that Melhem has written several books of criticism on African American poetry, that Nye writes of Latino culture and her travels through Latin America, that Adnan attacks the destruction of capitalist techno-patriarchy on the Arab world as well as on the American Indians, that Jabbour writes of the connectedness of the "anthropological daughters" of Africa and the Middle East in resistance to oppression, that love of the family and its generational powers extend to a "global consciousness," a love of the world. Jordanian American writer Diana Abu-Jaber when asked why she studies and "immerses" herself in Native American literature, responds:

I feel from the heart of the displaced and dispossessed.

I mourn for a generation of loss, and in that state, the spirits of the displaced and dispossessed *around me* raise their voices and speak as loudly as parents.

("Difference" 21)

The "global consciousness" and solidarity expressed in Arab American women's writing is not, however, limited to acts of mourning lost lands and histories. Like the leaders of the African American literary movement Melhem describes in Heroism in the New Black Poetry, these writers "connect with the past in order to understand the present and, when necessary, to change it. They offer not reconciliation with, but reconstruction of history, literature and society" (2). The reconstructive nature of this writing, particularly of a multiplicity of identities and histories that comprise Arab American subjectivities, suggests that while Arab American writing may "refer to a tradition still constructing itself" (Majaj 3), it simultaneously resists and subverts the logic of essentializing identities, including Orientalist stereotypes of Arabs that remain pervasive within U.S. culture. Because Arab American ethnic identity remains in the category of "another Other" and is often ambiguous to others, Arab Americans may battle with questions such as "what are you anyway?" (Collins 225). These ambivalences and confusions have been used by many Arab American women writers as a strategy of crossing cultural borders and forming political solidarities.

African American theorist, bell hooks has written that we should "be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the 'subject' when they surface at an historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time" (Yearning 28). Arab American writers are among these emerging voices, even as their "subjectivity" is marked by multiplicity and nomadism across many boundaries, be they generational, geo-political, or gender boundaries. Arab American women's writing asserts subjectivities rooted within Arab traditions as it simultaneously critiques and rewrites those traditions along with their fixed notions of

cultural authenticity and interpretation. It depicts Arab American experience as necessarily hybrid and cross-cultural, and critiques the understanding that the "precision of language, grace of thinking, and humanity of prose are circumscribed by the boundary waters of country and language and their attendant traditions" (Abu Jaber 20). Similarly, Vietnamese filmmaker and cultural theorist, Trinh Minh-ha writes:

Whether we choose to concentrate on another culture, or on our own culture, our work will always be cross-cultural. It is bound to be so, and in my case, not only because of my personal background and historical actualities, but also and above all because of the heterogeneous reality we all live today, in postmodern times--a reality, therefore, that is not a mere crossing from one borderline to the other or that is not merely double, but a reality that involves the crossing of an indeterminate number of borderlines, one that remains multiple in its hyphenation. (When the Moon Waxes Red 107)

These multiple border crossings across hyphenated spaces, geographies, and generations of family so prevalent in postmodern times chart the experience of ethnic subjects within North American culture. Arab American women's writing recognizes the "translation" of culture necessary in every utterance, even as it asserts multiple Arab identities; and it extends Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "Borderlands" beyond the shifting boundaries of hyphenated identities, beyond the "juggling of culture" (Borderlands 79), to an ideological construct, an "imagined community" grounded in a shared disinheritance and re-"generation" through the reconstructive act of writing.

Notes to Chapter 6: Arab American Women's Writing

¹ "In 1916, 100,000--one quarter of the population--were dying of starvation in Lebanon. France and Britain had blockaded the Lebanese coast to squeeze the Ottomans during the First World War, and with Turkish soldiers confiscating wheat and other foodstuffs, the native population had virtually nothing to eat for four years." See Greg Orfalea, Grapeleaves, 289.

² Evelyn Shakir has argued that Abinader's earlier poetry "dramatizes culturally prescribed female impotence," in "Starting Anew: Arab-American Poetry," 34.

³ In Orfalea's anthology, Grapeleaves, poet Ben Bennani writes, "The 'Arabness' of my poetic self gives me the heritage of a culture in which poetry is the record of the mind, the soul, and the spirit of the people. In America, unfortunately, poetry most often presents the individual in isolation" (218).

⁴ An example of this "non-existence" is captured in Britain's Balfour Declaration (1917) to establish a Jewish homeland. Referring to the region of Palestine as an appropriate area for Jewish settlement, the declaration stated, "a land without people for a people without land" despite its nearly 700,000 Arab inhabitants.

Chapter 7: Reinventing the Mother Tongue: The Failure of *the Word* in Morrison's Beloved and Kogawa's Obasan

To speak is to exist absolutely for the other . . . To speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization . . . Every colonized people--in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality--finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country . . . To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture.

--Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks

Perhaps the most insidious and least understood form of segregation is the word . . . For if the word has the potency to revive and make us free, it has also the power to blind, imprison, and destroy.

--Ralph Ellison, Shadow and Act

All these bits and pieces in which my history is fragmented, my culture piecemeal, my identifications fantasmatic and displaced; these splittings of wounds of my body are also a form of revolt. They speak a terrible truth. In their ellipses and silences they dismantle your authority: the vanity of your mimetic narratives and your monumental history; the metaphorical emblems in which you inscribe The Great Book of Life.

--Homi K. Bhabha, "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt"

To speak the language of the colonizer, to speak the language of the "mother country" as Fanon writes, is to replicate the repressive power structure of the dominant culture. This language imposed on colonized peoples wounds especially women of color who have been doubly-marginalized, doubly-marked by gender and race, who suffer both sexual wounds and wounds to the head, who exist in two often isolated territories--what Freud calls that "dark continent of femininity" and what the colonizer calls that dark continent of the darker race. In an imperialist context, the language of the master fails those rendered powerless or silent by its symbolic separation of the world into darkness and light, negative and

positive terms, wherein "one of the two terms forcefully governs the other" (Parry 30). According to Fanon, silence becomes marked as an agonistic space which functions as a weapon of resistance, but it may also be interpreted as a means of collusion with the power structure. However, this formula, which places speech in opposition to silence, ignores the multivalences of silence as a language with its own potential to dismantle authority. As Trinh Minh-ha asserts, "Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored" ("Not You/Like You" 74).

In their attention to linguistic metaphors, silence, rhythm and sound, Toni Morrison's Beloved and Joy Kogawa's Obasan reclaim silence not as a battle space, but as a source of power from which a new word of cultural difference springs. These novels dismantle the holy Word of English, the language of the "mother country," which is neither maternal nor nurturing, in order to speak their silenced histories of internal colonization in North America. Like the Arab American women novelists who recover their lost histories through the generational bonds of family, Morrison and Kogawa link history to the generational mother-daughter relationship, and in doing so, create worlds founded on a "living word," the maternal languages¹ of their own respective cultures. *The Word* and *silence* function as recurring tropes in Beloved and Obasan, these tropes coalescent with the transforming language of the texts. Both writers find a similar solution to the Word that fails them: they effectively reinvent language in two types of mother tongue harmonious with the task of rewriting their silenced histories.

"The speech that frees comes from the amniotic deep," writes Kogawa in her invocation to silence in the opening of Obasan. This reference to the amniotic conjures for me Julia Kristeva's "amniotic semiotic," a language embodied within the rhythms, sounds, and silences of the undifferentiated maternal flesh (Kristeva 195). Both Obasan and Beloved base their stories of the recuperation of lost mother/daughter relationships within "the thematics of the recuperative powers of language itself" (Lim, "Asian American Daughters" 241). The serene state of the amniotic represents both the child's union with the maternal body, and the language of the underground, the unconscious, or womb. Although Kristeva's theory draws an analogy between the fall from the unconscious language of the womb into patriarchal language and the break in the mother/daughter relationship, it fails to adequately reconcile the language of the unconscious with a communal language of political empowerment.² In contrast, within these novels, the generational bond of the mother/daughter relationship, broken prematurely and unnaturally by the workings of imperialist structures of slavery and internment, represents both a maternal bond and the bonding of "race consciousness" (Lim, "Japanese American Women" 293). These ethnic women writers, therefore, extend the psychoanalytic model of the individualized mother into the political realm,³ by reinventing the "amniotic semiotic" as a communal stream of the mother culture, and constructing language as a necessarily communal and political act.

In engaging in this cross-cultural comparison of texts, I am concerned specifically with how Morrison and Kogawa use language to dismantle the dominant order and to reclaim and reinvent their own mother cultures through language. Although both Morrison and Kogawa

reinvent languages reflective of their differing cultural identities, the similarities between their works are notable: both novels operate as fictionalized history, or historical fictions of internal colonization in North America--the slavery of African Americans and the internment of Japanese Canadians; both engage in actively rewriting the Word of white male discourse through a mixture of prose and poetry, of silences, rhythm, and word; and both reclaim history by recuperating the generational, cultural bond, represented by the mother/daughter relationships, and sundered by the workings of imperialist structures. Interestingly, also, both begin with an epigraph from the Bible, the scriptural Word, that refers to the act of naming, or conferring on a group of people an identity. Beloved opens: "I will call them my people,/which were not my people;/and her beloved,/which was not beloved./Romans 9: 25." Similarly, the epigraph to Obasan reads: "To him that overcometh/will I give to eat/of the hidden manna/and will give him/a white stone/and in the stone/a new name written . . . THE BIBLE." These two biblical passages allude to a reversal of identities, a reclamation of history for marginalized peoples through two distinctive acts of naming: that of "calling" or spoken language, and that of "writing" indelibly in stone, in order to forge a new identity.⁴ Morrison's epigraph, linked obviously with the name of her novel, may also be tied to the importance of "call and response" as a feature of storytelling in the black community (Harrison 48)⁵, a characteristic mode of identity that permeates the language of Beloved. Kogawa's epigraph, in contrast, is double-edged: the name inscribed on the white (head)stone (as Beloved's name is inscribed), ironically signals the death of identity, even as the "new name" is written.⁶ Both passages further

appropriate the spiritual Word of Christianity as resistance for those communities of people who have been its victims.

The contradiction of language as a site of empowerment and enslavement, the nominal power of language to create and destroy identities, is explored in both novels. In her essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Hortense Spillers explains how the naming power of the dominant culture has constructed the "black woman" as "a locus of confounded identities":

the names by which I am called in the public place render an example of signifying property *plus* . In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels at my own inventiveness. (65)

To get beyond the name-calling, the inscriptions of white stone which render women of color lifeless property, "to speak a truer word concerning myself," requires a language of "inventiveness." This process of revisioning language and the Word in order to reclaim an identity as beloved, simultaneously dismantles the master's mother tongue, and invents a new maternal/cultural language that defies the linearity and totalizing effects of dominant discourse. Although this process is often described as a "reclamation"⁷ of language, of history, of identity, of tradition or some essence of a cultural past, I would argue that these writers simultaneously *reinvent* language,⁸ creating language from its shredded layers of meaning, to construct potentially liberating social relations for the future.

In Obasan, Naomi Nakane's search for her lost mother parallels her search for identity, for a means of expression to break the silence of a lost generation that has existed only in silent territory. Upon her uncle's death, Naomi, a Nisei or second generation Japanese Canadian, returns to her aunt or Obasan. This family reunion precipitates for Naomi a flood of recollections from her childhood--displacement of her family by the Canadian government during the Japanese internment, her mother's disappearance in Japan, her father's death to tuberculosis. At the age of thirty-six, she learns from her Aunt Emily the fate of her lost mother, who, some thirty years earlier, was disfigured and subsequently died from the atomic blast in Nagasaki. In order to come to terms with her silenced past, Naomi must attend the voice of her dead mother, and from that voice create a maternal language to express her community's history.

In Beloved, Morrison's characters also seek to recover their silenced histories in language. 124 Bluestone Road is haunted by the unspoken memory Sethe's "murder" of her baby, Beloved, killed by a saw to her neck when the white men corner them in their yard and threaten to return them to slavery. Sethe; her living daughter, Denver; and her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs retreat into silence after this incident, while Beloved's ghost moves about the house, "rebuked and lonely." Sethe's struggle to rediscover her lost daughter and Denver's longing for her lost sister culminate in a trivocal poem at the center of the novel. But only when the women of the community unite to release Sethe from her eighteen years of solitude, is Beloved's ghost banished from the house.

In comparing Morrison's and Kogawa's understanding of language and silence, it would be a mistake not to recognize their similar and differing views on silence, which are grounded within both their cultures

and their experiences of colonization. In Japanese culture, silence takes several forms--*gaman*, the willed silence of steadfastness; *shikataganai*, the silence of resignation to the inevitable; and the silence of service or attendance to the needs of another. Within the tradition of moderation, modesty, and stoicism (Gottlieb 37), the younger generation must uphold its filial duty to the silent generation by silencing their own questions. In Buddhist tradition (we learn that Naomi's grandfather is Buddhist, although most of her family has converted to Christianity) as well as in the African tradition, sound or silence unlocks the spiritual state to which humans aspire; thus silence and the sounds that vibrate within the absence of language provide a space for spiritual strength. The spiritual potential of silence, however, may be undermined by the silence imposed by the dominant culture. Within the African American community's colonial structure, for example, as a people dependent on the community for support, withdrawal from the community into a state of silence was unhealthy, even suicidal (Harrison xxiv). Similarly, the destruction of the community for peoples of Japanese heritage is equated with a deathlike silence.⁹ Moreover, the slave had little or no voice in the presence of the master, just as the North American of Japanese descent had no voice in the presence of the government.

Silence also operated to maintain the lies of history and to protect certain audiences from its untold horrors. Within nineteenth-century slave narratives, the unspoken details of slave experience, especially the violation of slave women by white men, remained silenced because they were considered unpalatable to white audiences (Henderson 63). Morrison thus describes her desire to "fill in the blanks" of these slave narratives, much as Naomi (and Kogawa) seeks to fill in the personal and historical

blanks surrounding the Japanese internment and bombing of Nagasaki. In both texts, the mother's silence spins a web of protection around the child in order to shield her from the horrors of history; yet the severed mother/daughter relationships cannot be healed until these untold tales are heard.

The Betrayal of the Word in Beloved

Morrison describes her process of writing Beloved as rescuing "the dead girl . . . from the grave of time and inattention" (Naylor 593). The dead girl's deliverance signifies "saving" on a number of levels, because the character of Beloved may be read as an overdetermined sign. She is "the dead girl" returned to life, the word made flesh, this time in the form of a black slave girl; the "resurgent desire" of a community still held in bondage to its past (Lawrence 190), or the "return of the repressed 'other' of Sethe and the women of the community" (Henderson 75). And although characters (and critics alike) misread Beloved's hauntings as demonic, Sethe tells Paul D. that the ghost is "not evil, just sad"(8). The novel's epigraph suggests "beloved" as a name bestowed by God for those who have suffered; but Beloved is also that part of themselves the community must learn to call "beloved " before they can exorcise her anger and pain and experience wholeness. For Beloved is both daughter and ancestor of this community; the blighted promise of freedom, and the past "generation of slave women who did not survive the Middle Passage " (Henderson 75). Morrison describes Beloved as "the twin of the self":

the self not in the way we say "yourself," but to put a space
between those words, as though the self were really a twin or

a thirst or a friend or something that sits right next to you and watches you. (Naylor 589)

This space between "your" and "self" produces a poetry of word, silence, word, yielding up a new language of self-identity and history, a new relationship between self and other. The process of bringing the dead girl to life through writing, of giving words flesh is analogous to the liberation of the self. And like the buried parts of the self, *Beloved* speaks in the language of dreams and memory; Denver's conversation with her parallel the reader's with the text: "Sweet, crazy conversations full of half sentences, daydreams and misunderstandings more thrilling than understanding could ever be" (67). Yet through the language of Morrison's text, we come to understand more than conventional language could ever say.

Morrison's inventive language, including words like "disremember" and "rememory," links language to memory and the loss of language to forgotten or repressed history. When Sethe thinks of Nan, the woman who raised her, she forgets the details of what Nan told her, but remembers that she "used different words" (62). Nan, however, speaks the language of Sethe's dead mother who saved Sethe alone (for she is borne of a black man) among all her children after her crossing the Middle Passage and her rape by numerous white crewmen. "What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. The same language her ma'am spoke, and which would never come back" (62). This language, the maternal, African language, is in some sense lost to the daughters of Africa imprisoned on American land, and though it cannot be entirely recovered, it may be reinvented through the recovery of a lost history.

This maternal language speaks in tones dissonant with the dominant language, even as it renders "the metaphorical," "actual" (Wyatt 478). Throughout the novel, we are consistently reminded of the master's control of language: Paul D. cannot speak because, like an animal, he is forced to wear a bit in his mouth (69); in her sermons, Baby Suggs exclaims, "they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again" (88); Ella, who helps fugitive slaves, learns to read their silences: "she listened for the holes--the things the fugitives did not say; the questions they did not ask. Listened too for the unnamed, unmentioned people left behind" (92); and schoolteacher beats Sixo for his signifying "to show him that definitions belonged to the definers--not the defined" (190). The slave holders, the definers, separate the world into rigid classifications, as schoolteacher instructs his pupils to list the "animal" and "human" characteristics of the slaves in their notebooks. In contrast, the language that clamors around the house at 124 is an "undecipherable language" (198) that encompasses the unspeakable, unspoken thoughts of the women of 124 (199).

The need to decipher this indecipherable language, to decode and recode language, lies behind the silence of Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Denver who retreat into solitude after Sethe slits Beloved's throat with a saw to free her daughter from the death of slavery. Before this incident, Baby Suggs dedicated herself to preaching the Word--"an unchurched preacher . . . uncalled, unrobed, unannointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence" (87). Baby Suggs was committed to the Word as a means to unite the community; yet the Word "undid" her, placed her in the negative category, outside the boundaries inscribed in the Word of the church and its sacred rites, because as a black woman, she subverted the tradition of

the Word even as she spoke it. Baby Suggs' word, stripped of all its authority and ornamentation, was a living word emanating forth from her great heart. And her words were sparing: "Talk was low and to the point--for Baby Suggs, holy, didn't approve of extra" (87). As Stamp Paid remembers her from the pulpit in the Clearing, "she didn't deliver sermons or preach--insisting she was too ignorant for that--she *called* and the hearing heard" (177). Baby Suggs' call in the Clearing evokes the African tradition of call and response, a participatory language that unites the community in the rhythms of sound and the body through dance.

Baby Suggs makes a "living with her heart" "because slave life had 'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, *womb and tongue*'" (87, my emphasis). While her call to dance heals the communal body broken by slavery, the narrative connection of *womb and tongue* signifies how "the ownership of the body and authorship of language are. . . insidiously linked" (Lawrence 190). Under the institution of slavery, which denied slave women their motherhood in order to claim women's womb and children as property, Baby Suggs' womb is broken by the violation of rape, her children scattered, and her tongue silenced. The masters' separation of womb and tongue enabled them to control the slave woman's womb as property and to silence resistance. When Baby Suggs' son buys her freedom, her womb and tongue are temporarily united in her liberatory discourse, but they are broken once again when the slave owners enter her yard to reclaim her fugitive daughter-in-law, Sethe, and her grandchildren. Her word "rebuked and mocked by the bloodspill in her backyard" (177), Baby Suggs retreats to her room to contemplate color. The Word no longer held meaning for her because its power lay with the white men who entered her yard: "God puzzled her and she was too ashamed of

Him to say so" (177). Confined within the walls of her room, she would rather contemplate the meaning of color--blues and yellows and lavenders, but also her own color--which might have some meaning that didn't rely on words, especially white words, for expression. Despite Stamp Paid's plea,--"Listen here, girl, you can't quit the Word. It's given you to speak. You can't quit the Word, I don't care what all happen to you"(177)--Baby Suggs retreats into silence. The Word, she says to Stamp Paid, "That's one other thing they took from me" (178). The other things Baby Suggs alludes to here are her children and her selfhood: "Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like" (140). For Baby Suggs, as well as for Sethe and the other women in the novel, children function as a map to the self, a mirror, a language which, though sometimes silent, is not a language of betrayal. The power of language to speak the self, that transformation of the word into flesh from the silence of the womb, however, has been stolen by the white man, so that Baby Suggs' retreats into the silence of her womb-like room, into a space beyond language.

Sethe, like her mother-in-law, retreats into silence and isolation. Her sickness, which threatens to pervade the entire community, is embodied first in the haunted house, then in Beloved's pregnant hungers that reduce Sethe to a child. Throughout the house, the shame turns to silence, the hunger turns to silence, desire turns to silence. "Denver who thought she knew all about silence, was surprised to learn hunger could do that: quiet you down and wear you out" (239). But if Sethe and Beloved's bond is all-consuming, a "too hot love," the obsessive nature of this love is due in great part to the invasion of the white men, the men without skin,

without flesh, who speak in the language of fleshless words. In violating and destroying the symbiotic mother/daughter relationship through separation and enslavement, they transform the relationship into a parasitic bond wherein Beloved feeds off Sethe. Once fluid and changing, a symbiotic space without boundaries or subjecthood, the maternal body confuses identities, creating an unhealthy union. Kristeva describes the amniotic language as

a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing; it is feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasied clinging to the maternal body as a screen against the plunge (239).

In the trivocal poem at the center of the novel, the language, with its absence of boundary forming punctuation, its blurring of temporal and spatial distinctions, suggests how mother/daughter/sister, cling to the maternal body, in their own enclosed universe of 124 Bluestone Road. But the "whirl of words" in this poem, especially Beloved's poem, is not absent of meaning, as Kristeva suggests, for the maternal body bears the flesh of individual and communal history.

However, not until the community of women unites to reclaim Sethe and banish Beloved can the ghosts of 124 be expelled and the hungry silence be filled with a new maternal language. As this healing occurs, the suffering of the inhabitants finds meaning, not in language, but in sound. When the women gather before the old house, Ella hollers an overdetermined sound, joined by a chorus of women's voices:

They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like. (259)

Morrison, playing on the opening of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word," rewrites the passage to transcend the concept of the Word as the foundation of Western thought, moving back in time to sound, a universal sound that is inclusive rather than exclusive, recognizable by all.

For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (261)

That sound, as Sethe hears it from her kitchen window, is music emerging from the Clearing, from the open, unbounded space, to break "the back of words," fixed words with rigid backs, unyielding to change, and yet they are broken. The function of sound as preceding the "meaning" of words also points to the ways in which the "sound-sense of words tends to have a power that transcends the fixed representation of a word in favor of a sense-force" (Harrison 54), a force that resonates throughout the language of Morrison's text. The Clearing is the place where sound-sense and word-sense unite, where Baby Suggs used to preach the Word, and where Sethe is threatened then kissed by Beloved. The sound encompasses all these "rememories," moving in the collective voices of the community, like water, efficaciously toward renewal. The sound activates the word, saving Sethe from the silence of her guilt that feeds upon her, and releasing the community from its isolation.

Obasan: Silence that Speaks

Both Beloved and Obasan assert that the silences imposed by the master must be overcome in order to claim language, including silence, rhythm, sound and maternal language, as a site of empowerment. In her invocation, Kogawa's narrator distinguishes between two kinds of silence: "a silence that cannot speak" and a "silence that will not speak." These two categories of silence signify an unwilling, imposed silence and a willed silence, the latter representing a possible mode of resistance. These silences aren't necessarily juxtaposed, though their relationship is an ambivalent one, confounding definitions of collusion with and consent to those in power. The unwilling silence is weak, severed from language, but the willed silence holds power apart from language. Naomi, however, struggles to find meaning within the silence of the "amniotic deep": "the speaking dream . . . a sensate sea . . . that amniotic deep. To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace its absence." Silence, Naomi learns, does not necessarily denote absence, for silence has a presence of its own, and attending such voices requires understanding those sounds that precede language. The sound the narrator hears "is only sound. White sound. Words . . . hailstones seeking an underwater stream." White, in Japanese tradition, is the color of death; the white sounds fail like the dead who cannot speak. Naomi seeks meaning to her words, a fluid meaning, rather than cold hailstones which deface nature in her "steadfast silence."

As a child, Naomi is talkative in the comfort of her house, but silent outside in the unpredictable world: "Speech hides within me," she says, "watchful and afraid" (58). Naomi describes herself as secure in the presence of her mother; the branch grafted to her mother's trunk; this serene state, symbolized by the maternal body, produces a body within a

body "growing as a graft" (Kristeva 237). This state unifies the self/other relationship in one body. Similarly, Beloved says in her poem of Sethe, "I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop" (210). Naomi, however, like Beloved, becomes parasitic on her mother's body precisely because of the intervention of the white man; in Naomi's case, Old Man Gower's sexual violation severs the maternal relationship prematurely:

here in Mr. Gower's hands I become *other* --a *parasite* on her body, no longer of her mind. My arms are vines that strangle the limb to which I cling. I hold so tightly now that arms and leg become one through force. I am a growth that attaches and digs a furrow under the bark of her skin . . . the secret has already separated us . . . In the centre of my body is a rift. (64-65, my emphasis)

As a linguistic metaphor, the parasitical relationship is one of mutual silence, created by the strangulation of maternal language. Marked by a struggle for power and the threat of loss, this relationship devolves from the amniotic relationship of mutual harmony. The scene of violation by the white man transforms this harmonious relationship into one that strangles, depletes, and drains the maternal body. This rape by the dominant culture also signifies the split from the maternal culture and the severance from one's self-identity. Its wounds--visible on the body as the raised scar of saw teeth on Beloved's neck, and the "large moist wound" in Naomi's dreams that appears on the back of her head--expose the shame of violation that is fed by silence.

When Rough Lock Bill, the old man who lives in the woods, questions young Naomi's ability to talk, she remains silent (57). Rough Lock accepts her silence as wisdom:

Birds could all talk once. Bird language. Now all they can say is their own names. That's all. Can't say any more than their names. Just like some people. Specially in the city eh? Me, me, me . . . But smart people don't talk too much. Redskins know that. The King bird warned them a long time ago. (147)

Rough Lock, in his backwoods wisdom, asserts that language is egocentric, that it is now used exclusively to assert self-identity although it once was a tool of communication. In this language myth, the birds, like the people in the city, symbolize the narcissism of white society, free from the King bird, yet trapped within themselves. The King bird silenced the "Redskins" (Native Americans) with fear and intimidation, and therefore they have opted for silence. Although Naomi does later find wisdom in her silent mother, Rough Lock's myth reinforces another myth: that silence is always wisdom before the oppressor. Such submissive silence, however, offers no liberation from one's oppression. Ironically, when Rough Lock leaves Naomi alone with her friend, she finds herself in danger of drowning and cries out to save herself. She relies on language, an animal cry, a bird call for help, and Rough Lock comes to her rescue.

Most of the Japanese Canadian community in Obasan live by this myth in a collective silence of resignation accepted as wisdom, failing to acknowledge their own imminent cultural drowning. Even as they are carried in the trains away from their homes and family, they remain silent:

We are the silences that speak from stone. We are the despised rendered voiceless, stripped of car, radio, camera and every means of communication, a trainload of eyes covered with mud

and spittle. We are the man in the Gospel of John, born into the world for the sake of the light. (111)

Like Morrison, Kogawa rewrites the scriptural word of John's Gospel so that her voiceless people become the Word. This revision exposes the irony of the Word: that it works for some, but not for those stripped of communication, unless they naively believe in their internment as a mission, believe themselves as light sent into the darkness, "sent to the sending, that we may bring sight" with their mud-covered eyes (111). Kogawa's language moves like a train through the barren landscape with no determinate destination, offering a multiplicity of interpretations: her people have great faith in the word of the King bird; they are suddenly unblinded to recognize their position as the living sacrifice offered to their government in their submissive silence; they will never arrive at meaning.

Indeed, Obasan, in its sparsity of language and dialogue, reads like a silent film with its visual images constructed impressionistically in "elliptical, barren language" (Gottlieb 39). Obasan, the exemplar of her silent people whose "language remains deeply underground," whose silence is one of service, speaks in short, repetitive phrases: "Everyone someday dies, " "This house. This body. Everything old" (15). Retaining her Japanese tradition of subservient reticence along with her traditional name, Obasan is juxtaposed to the modern Aunt Emily, "BA, MA, word warrior" (32), with her language of defiance. Emily's journal, which appears at the center of the novel, transforms the narrative voice from Naomi's poetics to Emily's polemical, factual discourse, using dominant language, even as it seeks to counter the dominant order of the Canadian government and those complicit with their racist policies. Emily's writings

serve to remove the mud-covered spittle from Naomi's eyes, and yet Naomi sees Emily's words as fleshless, as words without meaning:

All of Aunt Emily's words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions, are like scratchings in the barnyard, the evidence of much activity, scaly claws hard at work. But what good they do, I do not know-- those little black typewritten words--rain words, cloud droppings. They do not touch us where we are planted here in Alberta, our roots clawing the sudden prairie air. The words are not made flesh. (189)

Aunt Emily employs the language of her oppressor, fleshless words, to get at the truth, and therefore her words hold little meaning for Naomi in her experience of isolation. We might fault Emily as Bhabha faults Fanon: for *inverting* the power structure of hegemonic order without *subverting* it, by using the language of the dominant culture (Parry 30). Unlike Baby Suggs, however, who gives up the Word when the flesh of reality mocks her, Emily persists in her belief in language to discover truth. Emily's angry, resistant words lack perhaps in love, the great heart that beats from Baby Suggs, and the love that Naomi finally discovers in her silent mother, but they succeed in opening doors through which Naomi must walk to find the meaning behind her mother's death. Although Naomi is critical of Aunt Emily who throws the word stones of the oppressor back in their face, she recognizes that ultimately resignation to the imposed silence of the oppressor is self-destruction: "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (243). Neither fearful, fleshless silence nor fleshless words offer Naomi an effective language through which to discover truth.

The language Naomi discovers, however, unites the maternal silence with the word stone to create a living language. In her dream of the Grand Inquisitor, Naomi envisions the old man prying open her mother's lips. The Inquisitor with his relentlessly oppressive questions and his inability to hear any response but that of his own judgment, receives only a reply of silence. "What the Grand Inquisitor has never learned is that the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence" (228). The Inquisitor as the colonial power, the government, cannot attend the silence of his subject. "Only when he enters her abandonment will he be released from his own" (228).¹⁰ Naomi's dream suggests the interdependency of the colonizer/colonized relationship: only when the Inquisitor can attend the silence of his subject, can he surrender his imprisoning role as inquisitor, as master of language, which limits his own freedom and understanding as well as his subject's. Silence as attendance is the avenue by which we can deconstruct the power relations inscribed in the territorial struggle over language.

In her relentless search for her mother, Naomi identifies with the Inquisitor because she resists relinquishing language to attend her silent mother's voice. When she learns of her mother's death in the aftermath of the atomic blast in Nagasaki, Naomi invokes not silence, as she began her narration, but her silent mother. Thoughtfully, Naomi regards the photograph of her and her mother on a street corner in Vancouver. Earlier in the novel, when Naomi describes this picture, she recalls her mortification and embarrassment as she hides behind her mother's leg, hides from the stare of a small boy, silenced, fearful of his laughter. But as she describes the picture towards the end of her search, it becomes an image of union between mother and child:

My fat arm clings to your leg. Your skirt hides half my face.
 Your leg is a tree trunk and I am branch, vine, butterfly. I am
 joined to your limbs by right of birth, child of your flesh, leaf of
 your bough. (242-43)

In this scene, it is the flesh of the mother that connects Naomi to life, not the fleshless words, the word stones through which she began her search. Naomi now perceives herself as an offspring of her silent mother, a branch of her trunk, a leaf of her bough, bearing life out of the steadfast silence. As she walks to the coulee in the pre-dawn stillness, after her uncle's funeral, she sees, "Above the trees, the moon is a pure white stone. The reflection is rippling in the river--water and stone dancing. It's a quiet ballet, soundless as breath" (247). The moon recalls the white stone of words, in a purified state, reflected in the living waters. Now water and stone, silence and word dance together in a fluid form of expression, a maternal language, bound neither by word nor by silence.

The Maternal Tongue as Communal Language

Obasan and Beloved, I have argued, may be read as novels about transcending hegemonic forms of language, and about coming into an "amniotic semiotic" of maternal, cultural language. According to Kristeva, the mother/daughter relationship describes the unified state of being before the subjective fall into language; her model, however, does not account for the maternal tongue as a communal language--one that recaptures the unity and security of the womb, even as it addresses the needs of the community. Kristeva asserts that the language in which the I/she boundary becomes lost "turns into rhythm--it is rhythm" (191). This rhythmic sound recurs in the poetics of both Beloved and Obasan. For

example, in *Beloved's* poem, our sense of displacement is exaggerated by the rhythm of repetition and the silence of spaces, as well as by the absence of spacial or temporal distinctions:

All of it is now it is always now there will never be a
time when I am not crouching and watching others who
are crouching too I am always crouching the man on
my face is dead his face is not mine (211).

In a communal sense, this passage describes and imitates the rhythms of the Middle Passage, the sundering of the African people crowded on slave ships, the "Sixty Million and more" who died in the crossing to whom Morrison dedicates her book. In *The Drama of Nomo*, Paul Carter Harrison describes the rhythm of the Middle Passage as a "unified cadence" "urging the body to retain the potency of its rhythm, its life force" (xiii), despite the suffering it endures. *Beloved* discovers this life force in her mother's face, but then she is plunged into the water and tries to recover that face: "Sethe's is the face that left me . . . her smiling face is the place for me" (213). *Beloved* resists the plunge into the subjective world, its differentiation and boundaries that threaten separation from the maternal body; her language moves in rhythmic amniotic waves washing her back towards her mother. Yet, although the amniotic water provides the comfort of fetal sleep, it also signifies the sea of confounded and submerged identities, the oceans of the Middle Passage that threaten cultural drowning, for enwombed in these waters, we have yet to come to life.

Naomi similarly describes the immersion in the sea of silence as a separation from the mother: "The child is forever unable to speak . . . The child forever fears to tell . . . I beg that the woundedness may be healed and that the limbs may learn to dance. But you stay in a black and white

photograph, smiling your yasashi smile" (243). Naomi, like *Beloved*, longs for this serene reunion with the mother, the maternal smile that heals the woundedness of separation inflicted by the dominant order. Naomi's and *Beloved*'s struggle to cry out from the silence and return to the mother symbolizes a return to a maternal language which speaks their cultures. By dismantling the holy Word of English, Kogawa and Morrison define their cultural spaces in the mythic mother tongue of their respective cultures. The return to the mother represents a return to their silenced histories, a sacred place of joy and distress, a prelinguistic state that cannot be verbalized with "theories of Being, logos, and its laws" (Kristeva 239).

Although the characters of *Beloved* and *Obasan* are doubly-marginalized, their position of race incites the major conflicts in both stories, whereas their position as ethnic women leads to their resolutions: through language, they effectively shift the metaphor of the dominant white male "to the maternal metaphor for self and history" (Henderson 79). Yet, in both novels, the maternal metaphor is significantly the cultural mother rather than Kristeva's universal mother. For, as Toril Moi argues, Kristeva's model reduces all positions of marginality to the same struggle--the pre-Oedipal return to the universal mother--and creates a politically ineffective construct (170). These authors, however, construct language as a necessarily political, and thereby account for what Moi calls "the collective revolutionary project." Both Naomi and Sethe attain the living word through the cultural community--Sethe, confronted by the black women of her town, and with the encouragement of Paul D; Naomi, in the presence of her extended family. The community, then, is the inseparable mother/self, the group that recognizes the needs of the silenced ones.

In the amniotic state, all needs are satisfied without language; the communal, though nurturing like the mother, relies on language to express its needs. After watching Sethe diminish with her obsessive attention to Beloved's desires, Denver decides that "somebody had to be saved" (252). When she is told, "Take care of yourself," "she heard it as though it were what language was made for" (252). Through language Denver learns not only that she has a self to preserve, but also that she must use language to save herself, her mother, her sister, her twin, by going out into the community and asking for help. Similarly, in Kogawa's sequel to Obasan now in progress, the author depicts the death of Obasan, the silent one, who expresses her first direct request on her death bed. Naomi states, "She knew that I knew that speech is dependent on knowing needs" (122). Without the language to express her needs, Sethe withers to nothing in the confines of her house. Naomi says of the train full of her people enroute to the internment camp, "We disappear into the future undemanding as dew" (112). The hungry needs that produce the silent resignation of a community cannot be expressed in the dominant language, which like Aunt Emily's letters, are mere "symbols of communion, the materials for communication" that provide "less than holy nourishment" (182). In rewriting their silenced histories in a new maternal language, Morrison and Kogawa offer the reader "living words" rather than word stones to eat.

To authenticate the past, to give voice to a silenced history, is to recapture from the amniotic past the fullness of life broken by Western logocentric philosophy which severs silence from speech. The Word as the transcendent signifier becomes a white stone slung round the necks of those placed outside its boundaries; an echoing in the Clearing where the

people no longer gather to listen. In tearing down the hegemonic story of the Word and reconstructing their untold stories in the maternal languages of their cultures, Beloved and Obasan resist interpretation, dispersing meaning through silence, sounds and speech, along a stream of possible signifiers. This new language, used to rewrite the text of history, of community, and of self, offers possibilities for new political relationships as well. As critics engaged in the theoretical inquisition of these literatures, we must attend the silence to comprehend the avenues of speech by which these voices say, "This is not a story to pass on" (Beloved 275), even as the story insists on being heard.

Notes to Chapter 7: Reinventing the Mother Tongue

¹In "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's Beloved," Jean Wyatt uses the term "maternal symbolic" to, as she says, "discuss an alternative language incorporating maternal and material values but also a system that, like Lacan's symbolic, locates subjects in relation to other subjects" (475). What Wyatt discusses in terms of the symbolic order, I discuss here in terms of culture, community, and politics; that is to say, my interpretation of the maternal in both texts emphasizes its symbolics as culture or "race consciousness." For Wyatt's article, see PMLA 103, no. 3 (May 1993): 474-488.

²Although the function of the communal and political is assigned to the symbolic in Kristeva, her theory of the amniotic semiotic, I believe, does not adequately examine how language operates within a community. I discuss this problem, along with Toril Moi's critique of Kristeva, in the last section of this chapter.

³ In "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Morrison argues, "If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfill only the obligation of my personal dreams—which is to say yes, the work must be political" (344).

⁴ See Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, "Japanese American Women's Life Stories," 300. Lim reads this biblical reference ironically as an interrogation of "the course of submission and assimilation to white Christian ideology." Mae G. Henderson interprets Morrison's epigraph as emphasizing the "religious importance of historical reclamation and repossession that redeems characters from the 'curse of the Law; figured in the master's discourse." See "Toni Morrison's Beloved: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text," 64. Through Christian imagery, both texts point to how "white" Christianity, or the Christianity of the dominant culture, has been hypocritically used to justify slavery, internment, and other oppressions of people of color, while its victims are encouraged to endure in silent submission.

⁵ It is also interesting to note that the epigraph of Morrison's Jazz reads "I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name. I am the sign of the letter and the designation of the the division." (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

⁶ Obasan, is in fact, much more self-consciously concerned with written forms of language, and much of Kogawa's novel incorporates letters, diaries, and government documents. Naomi's story, after all, is told in the form of autobiography. Her power to construct a story in written language is not one possessed by the mostly illiterate slaves in Morrison's Beloved. Thus an oral quality dominates the poetic language of Beloved, even as both novels encompass the languages of dreams, speech, sermons, music, nature, body language, etc.

⁷ See, for example, King-Kok Cheung, "Don't Tell: Imposed Silences in The Color Purple and The Woman Warrior," PMLA 103 (March 1988) 162. Cheung asserts that "reclaiming the mother tongue is much more than reproducing a dialect or marshaling a new vocabulary; it is also bringing to life a rich oral tradition in which women have actively participated."

⁸ Erika Gottlieb asserts that Naomi's narrative style includes extensive linguistic experimentation and "Japanese Canadian speech patterns which makes the reader feel that "the writer is virtually reinventing language." See "The Riddle of Concentric Worlds in Obasan," 39.

⁹ In Kogawa's, Obasan, for example, Aunt Emily tells Naomi, "To a people for whom community was the essence of life, destruction of the community was the destruction of life"(186).

¹⁰Gayle Fujita describes this form of silence as "attendance," the legacy of Japanese ancestry that "supports Naomi in her moment of greatest need." See "To Attend the Sound of Stone: The Sensibility of Silence in Obasan," MELUS 12: 3 (Fall 1985) 39.

Chapter 8: On the Bodies of Third World Women: Cultural Impurity, Prostitution, and Other Nervous Conditions

It is women everywhere in what is called the Third World who are changing things.

--Doris Lessing, African Laughter

Any [black] woman walking the streets of Harare today has to be extremely resilient . . . because they really are suffering the sum of all oppressions that were in practice at that time. [Sexism] and racism and capitalism--all of them--they were right at the bottom of this heap of oppressions. And so the only way to survive is to find some mechanism of resilience.

--Tsitsi Dangarembga, contemporary Zimbabwean novelist, interview¹

Individual women from the [third world] appear on the feminist stage as representatives of the millions of women in their own societies. To what extent they do violence to the women they claim authority to write and speak about is a question that is seldom raised.

--Marnia Lazreg, "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a woman on women in Algeria"

In postcolonial Zimbabwe, women are involved in the construction of a collective text of their lives called "the women's book." This book, written by rural women who choose both the topics and materials, funded by government ministries, and orchestrated mainly by urban women in order to involve rural women in the development of the country, is described as "really revolutionary . . . challeng[ing] the fabric of [Zimbabwean] culture and customs" (Lessing 362). "The women's book," the collective text written by postcolonial women themselves, functions, it would seem, as an antidote, a resistant, curative story to what Homi Bhabha describes as the "English Book," the text that crops up in the remote corners of the world as the sign of colonial authority and the superiority of Western patriarchal civilization. These colonizing texts of the civilizing mission, written "in the name of the

father and the author . . .install the sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art creates the conditions for a beginning, a practice of narrative" ("Signs Taken for Wonders" 166). If, as Bhabha claims, the texts of the civilizing mission suggest the triumph of Empire, then the collective third world women's text suggests the triumph of decolonization. Like the writings by North American ethnic women discussed in the previous two chapters, the collective women's document creates alternative narrative practices for subaltern female self-representation. This revolutionary document, written, as it were, in the name of women who do not necessarily have access to the tools of authorship and its implicit authority, by women participating in the reconstruction of postcolonial Zimbabwe, constitutes what Karen Caplan describes as an "outlaw genre" because it simultaneously "'authorizes' and validates the identity of the individual writer" and constructs a collective document that resists the hierarchical structures of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonial discourse ("Resisting Autobiography" 120-21).

In order to discuss two novels by third world women, Woman at Point Zero (1975) by Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi and Nervous Conditions (1988) by Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga, I invoke "the women's book" as a model against which we may examine third world women's narratives, particularly those produced by postcolonial bourgeois women writers. Although these two authors employ narrative forms and languages that are more conventional than those often found either in novels by North American women of color or in "the women's book,"² both novels operate as collective texts of women's multiple experiences that expose the problematic social conditions facing postcolonial women as they examine the heterogeneity of third world women's experience. The double

protagonists within these novels comprise a collective subject that problematizes the role of the bourgeois postcolonial subject. Her economic and social privilege is examined indirectly through the class differences between women characters as elemental to the struggle against the patriarchal class system. In both Woman at Point Zero and Nervous Conditions, the lower class woman's voice dominates the text, thereby disrupting the hierarchy among women. In giving their bourgeois women a significant but less pervasive voice, both authors indirectly interrogate their own positions of privilege and comment on their role as bourgeois women in the construction of a collective, yet multiple women's subjectivity. As Gayatri Spivak argues, "the postcolonial bourgeoisie must most specifically learn to negotiate with the structure of enabling violence that produced her."³ So while these texts on one level recount resistances to patriarchal and colonial control, the bourgeois characters/authors implicate themselves in this "structure of enabling violence" in order to examine the fragmentation between women that results from the structures of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism.

The collective text, in effect, operates as a collective body of women's voices, a re-embodiment of the disembodied voices of postcolonial intellectuals and the silenced bodies of subaltern women who exist at point zero within the hierarchies of international capitalism, still suffering the "nervous conditions" of post- or neo-colonial race, gender, and class oppression. Significantly, both novels were initially rejected within their own countries for their pointed critiques against male domination. All of El Saadawi's writings were banned for eleven years under Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, her books were censored in Jordan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, and she eventually was imprisoned by Sadat for speaking out against male

domination in Egypt. Similarly, Dangarembga's novel was rejected by male dominated publishers for being too "negative"⁴ in its depiction of women's lives. Both novels are African for both Egypt and Zimbabwe lie on the African continent, though Egypt is predominately Arab and Zimbabwe predominately Shona (70%) and Ndebele (16%); and both were colonized by the British, although Egypt received independence in 1922 after forty years of occupation, whereas Zimbabwe fought a bloody ten-year revolution to force the British out, and finally won independence in 1980. These significant differences in national formation are evident in the fact that El Saadawi writes in her native Arabic, and Dangarembga in the colonizer's language, English. Both texts are foremost concerned with issues of gender and class oppression, yet their (post)colonial contexts shape the ways in which gender and class issues are played out on women's bodies.

With the hybridization of culture resultant from colonialism, indigenous women's bodies have come to signify, within indigenous male ideology, sites of cultural impurity, bodies polluted or sickened by diseases of Western influence. However, these women writers reclaim women's bodies as sites of resistance to both the internal "diseases" of the patriarchal class system and the external "disease" of Western colonialism/imperialism. In Woman at Point Zero and in Nervous Conditions the disease, manifest as prostitution and as anorexia nervosa, respectively, one with its roots in the conditions of lower class women, the other in women of privileged classes, transforms woman's body into a site of rebellion. The women are cured to some degree by women uniting across class lines to form a collective body, a collective book written as part of the process of decolonization against the oppressive legacies of patriarchy and colonialism.

Sexuality and Politics in Woman at Point Zero

In much of the literature of the Middle East, the prevalent figure of the female prostitute signifies the nation prostituted to the colonizer for superficial gains, bands of gold, and the false beauties of Western "modernization." In post World War I Egypt, many Egyptian peasants and middle class expressed a growing opposition to British colonial presence and the corruption it wrought on traditional religious and family structures. As prostitution "mushroomed"⁵ in the streets of Cairo and around British bases, the corruption of various political leaders and groups who "prostituted" themselves to colonial interests was further reflected in the burgeoning sexual corruption of lower class women whose "dishonor" became emblematic of the condition of the Egyptian state. Naguib Mahfouz's Midaq Alley portrays a Cairo neighborhood "in almost complete isolation from all surrounding activity" (1) as its inhabitants comes in contact with the influences of British occupation, which draws the young men into the army and the women into prostitution. Although many Egyptian men collaborated with and benefited from the British occupation, Egyptian women were expected to bear the burden of cultural tradition by keeping their "honor" intact.

El-Saadawi faults Mahfouz for his objectification of women in his symbolic equating of sexual aggression against women with colonial aggression against a nation, and asserts that

at the individual level the honour and integrity of women remains for Mahfouz a totally different thing to that of men. The honour of women is preserved or lost depending upon the type of sexual relations which they have with men, rather than on the other aspects of their life. (Hidden Face of Eve 166)

In resistance to the dominant male ideology reflected in Mahfouz's work, El Saadawi directly incorporates elements of his systems of relations and further sharpens her criticism of that system by focusing on prostitution. Her novel, Woman at Point Zero (1975), a feminist⁶ reading of prostitution and the social, economic, and political factors that define women's oppression within Arab society, challenges male understanding of the conditions of women's lives and subverts her own position of privilege within the existing relations of power.

In this novel, Firdaus, who is imprisoned for murdering a pimp, recounts her life story as she awaits her death. As a prostitute from the lower class, she must tell her story to the psychiatrist, Dr. El Saadawi, who operates as "translator," much like Spivak's postcolonial intellectual who must represent the silenced subaltern woman. In giving voice to Firdaus, Woman at Point Zero may be viewed as a response to a tradition of Arab literature which has failed to give women a voice other than that which is dislocated in patriarchal discourse; but it should also be read with an understanding of its political/historical context. According to Barbara Harlow,

Firdaus' story is the history of an Egyptian peasant girl victimized by the conservative indigenous traditions of her country and exploited by the post-colonial corruption which characterized Egyptian society and government, particularly under Anwar Sadat. (137)

In the 1983 English translation of the novel, Firdaus' story is framed by El Saadawi's explanation of her role as psychiatrist within the prison, her research on women prisoners, her husband's thirteen-year imprisonment as a political detainee, and her own subsequent arrest under Sadat, who

imprisoned 1500 intellectuals, writers, and journalists who voiced opposition to his policies in 1981.⁷ Although the terms of Firdaus' and El Saadawi's imprisonment are very different, they both signify ways in which corrupt postcolonial governments attempt to silence and contain resistance. Throughout the novel, Firdaus expresses contempt for these "kings, princes, and rulers" (11) by spitting on their pictures in the newspaper and exposes the criminal corruptions of a system that leads a woman to murder. El Saadawi's research of women political prisoners, published as Women and Neurosis in Egypt in 1976, aptly describes the "nervous conditions" of Egyptian women's lives; whereas, her writing of Woman at Point Zero recounts a woman's individual story, described by El Saadawi herself as "half way between fiction and fact . . . Imagination is only twenty per cent, maybe ten per cent" ("Reflections" 402). According to El Saadawi, Firdaus' story asserts the "need to challenge and to overcome those forces that deprive human beings of their right to live, to love, and to real freedom" (iv). Her writing, however, fails to redeem Firdaus from death, except in a symbolic sense.

Firdaus' story arises from silence, from her initial refusal to speak. Like the female characters in Kogawa's and Morrison's novels, Firdaus embodies the silences of both personal and spiritual strength. Furthermore, she recognizes, like Fanon's native intellectual, that "To speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (Black Skin, White Masks 17), and she believes that the doctor is one of "them," one of the repressive authority figures implicated in her hanging. In some sense, Firdaus' assessment of the doctor's authority is correct; the doctor (like the Western reader) is implicated in this collective "they" who hold authority over the prisoner, and the doctor must relinquish her position of authority before

Firdaus will address her. Firdaus' silence, therefore, resonates with strength and dignity and nags at the doctor, ". . . her refusal to see me, the feeling that I was helpless, and of no significance grew on me . . . Since she had rejected me, did that mean she was a better person than me" (3)? The power of Firdaus' silence reverses the hierarchical relationship between the doctor and the prisoner, placing the doctor in a position of dis-ease, yet preparing her to approach Firdaus' story no longer from an assumed position of superiority. When Firdaus finally does agree to speak, perhaps because she believes that the doctor is not entirely other, her voice is authoritative and urgent. "Let me speak. Do not interrupt me," she commands. The doctor grants Firdaus her uninterrupted say in the session, but Firdaus too allows the doctor a hearing of the story of her life. In so doing, she struggles for a position of subjectivity that does not exist entirely through and for the other.

This zero point of subjectivity from which Firdaus speaks is a space emptied of desire, a final, total vanishing point from which the subject refuses to be subjected to by those in authority. In making a choice to throw off the constrictions imposed on her by this corrupt society, she constantly subverts this space that she is forced into. Firdaus, a lower class woman, incomplete and mutilated by her clitoridectomy, is positioned at point zero by her society, yet she longs for a space from which she can assert herself. Although she attempts to gain authority by transgressing class boundaries, she is consistently forced back to roots in the lower class: "Only my make-up, my hair and my expensive shoes were 'upper class'. With my secondary school certificate and suppressed desires I belonged to the 'middle class'. By birth I was lower class" (12). Her position at point zero is simultaneously one of lack and of subversion, because the "nature of

[her] subalternity leads [her] to struggle against the process of hierarchization as a whole."⁸ Firdaus' voice speaking from this empty space contains the power of subversion because she has turned the complete negation of women to the zero degree to a self-claimed space where she can no longer be subjected. At this point, she is complete, but because of this she cannot exist in a world where to be a subject she must be subjected to a corrupt system which she completely rejects; in other words, she cannot exist as a subject within the existing patriarchal class system, therefore, she must be hanged. In refusing to sign an appeal to the President for pardon, she says, "I prefer to die for a crime I have committed rather than to die for one of the crimes which you have committed" (101). Even in the face of death, Firdaus asserts her willful opposition to the system.

Firdaus finally attains liberation through the tearing away of veils of lies, so that she is completed by "truth" at the same time that she accepts her position at point zero. Over and over in her story she repeats, "The veil was torn from my eyes" (72), but the veil persists, repositions itself like some hegemonic decree. She "removes the veil" when she learns that money is power, then when she gains wealth, then when she gives up her position as a prostitute for "respect," and becomes a poor office worker. Finally, she resolves after consistently being exploited at work, "that the least deluded of all women was the prostitute" (86). But this veil too is rent when she tears up 3,000 pound notes offered by a wealthy prince for her services, then confesses to killing the pimp, and declares, "I knew why they were so afraid of me. I was the only woman who had torn the mask away and exposed the face of their ugly reality" (100). Woman At Point Zero is primarily concerned with stripping away and exposing the corrupt strategies of

patriarchal dominance--including social, religious, economic, and political control--and returning to a zero point where all has been revealed and discarded.

Firdaus' ability to manipulate the roles she is cast in by those more powerful than she is evident in her embracing prostitution as a method of liberation. She insists on a high price for her body, rejects men who are dirty, and resists by making her body "passive, inert, unfeeling" in these sexual encounters (85). After her own experiences as wife, prostitute, and office worker, she characterizes all women as "prostitutes who sold themselves at varying prices" (76). In her outcry against male dominance, she exposes the multiple forms of hypocrisy and control used to gain authority over women. For example, she states, "The men I hated most of all were those who tried to give me advice, or told me that they wanted to rescue me from the life I was leading . . . they thought they were better than I was . . . they saw themselves in some kind of chivalrous role" (88). Indeed, all those who supposedly rescue Firdaus, men and women alike, end up using her for their own purposes. When she is propositioned by a policeman for a visiting Head of State and rebuked as "unpatriotic" at her refusal, she responds, "I told the man from the police that I knew nothing about patriotism, that my country had not only given me nothing, but had also taken away anything I might have had, including my honour and my dignity" (90). Firdaus' refusal to serve "her country" and those government officials who attempt to master her through manipulation empowers her and poses a threat to the state she exposes as corrupt. She also counters here the nationalist ideology that encouraged collaboration with corrupt leaders and positioned lower class women as "patriotic prostitutes" who must bear the burdens of nation without benefiting from the nation in any way. By

refusing to prostitute herself to state "interests," Firdaus, in effect, extends the control of her body to an act of rebellion against the state.

Some Arab male critics have demonstrated their limited understanding of feminist politics by characterizing Arab women's writing as individualistic and autobiographical rather than as fictional accounts representative of a collective social reality.⁹ Women's individual lack of freedom is, however, part of the collective social reality; yet this fact seems to escape critic Georges Tarabishi who, in Woman Against Her Sex: A Critique of Nawal El-Saadawi gives more credence to women's lack of the phallus than to her lack of freedom within patriarchal society. Tarabishi describes Firdaus as "only interested in liberating herself, not her female sister" (32), and further faults El Saadawi for "her individualistic philosophy, combined with her elitist attitude" (33). Yet, Tarabishi misses two key points of the text: the individual woman struggling against social and economic dominance represents her sisters' struggle and lends courage to that struggle; and the doctor interrogates her position of privilege and relinquishes her authority in order to hear Firdaus. The doctor takes Firdaus in: "she vibrated within me" (iii); even as she realizes that "Firdaus had more courage than I" (110). Firdaus' story, therefore, operates as a "way in"¹⁰ to the subaltern woman's experience, for Firdaus' courage has infused those stony parts of the doctor, of the listener, of the reader. Thus the story functions as a collective cure and protection for the listener, and for the many sisters who might hear it.

Tarabishi's reading of El Saadawi's novel places the author herself on the metaphorical psychoanalytic couch while subjecting her to the very methods of analysis El Saadawi so brutally and insightfully critiques in Woman at Point Zero. As a medical doctor, a doctor of the body, El Saadawi finds herself in the prison serving as a psychiatrist, literally in Arabic, "a

doctor of the spirit" or "self." She engages Firdaus in a kind of talking cure, for "in her role as healer, the woman physician is transformed into a mediator of discourse" (Malti-Douglas 131). The roles of doctor and patient are confounded, however, for the doctor experiences Firdaus' initial rejection as that of unrequited love, comparing her to a man with whom she had fallen in love: "I felt rejected, not only by him, not only by one person amongst the millions that peopled the vast world, but by every living being or thing on earth, by the vast world itself" (4). El Saadawi in effect becomes the patient, or at least shares this role with Firdaus, by exposing her own need for Firdaus' recognition. This act of intersubjectivity subverts the psychoanalytic model, particularly in its Freudian form, which relies on male models that enforce the Law of the Father and ignore the economic and social conditions that bind women within a system of male dominance. Tarabishi believes that feminists should reject power and "tame the penis" (9) rather than transform existing power structures and concepts of power. His prescriptions for gender relations, however, say more about Tarabishi's own problems with powerful women than about the theories he deploys.

El Saadawi, in exposing the lies of patriarchal dominance and asserting the "truth," unsettles existing power structures. Firdaus, like the author who is subsequently imprisoned for her writing, is condemned not for murder but for telling the truth. With each tearing of the veil, Firdaus exposes one of the many and varied tools of dominance that bind her, discontinuous yet connected forms of repression which cannot be understood by any simple formula. Her story emphasizes her sexual and economic exploitation as means by which patriarchal tactics of domination have oppressed Arab women. Firdaus' empty space at point zero suggests a ground of intersubjectivity from which we may move beyond such volatile

power relations. But her male oppressors refuse to join her there, and her refusal to accept her position within their enslaving structure condemns her to death.

Firdaus, whose name means "paradise" in Arabic, is both martyr and mystic, both prostitute and holy woman, both hell and paradise, as the language of the novel suggests.¹¹ Though Tarabishi cannot get beyond the "flesh and blood" level of the story, and characterizes the doctor's respect for this woman as neurotic, clearly El Saadawi accords the "dishonorable" prostitute a most honorable spiritual position within the symbolism of the text. In applying traditionally male religious images to Firdaus, El Saadawi alludes to the oppositional mystic tradition of Islam found in Sufism in order to reclaim woman's spirituality as well as her body.¹² Luce Irigaray has described the mystical experience as "an experience of the loss of subjecthood, of the disappearance of the subject/object opposition [that] would seem to hold a particular appeal for women whose very subjectivity is anyway being denied and repressed by patriarchal discourse" (qtd. in *Moi* 136). The blatantly mystical imagery that surrounds Firdaus comes to represent her empowerment within an otherwise male discourse that casts her only in negative terms. In the opening scene, Firdaus is seated on the cold floor of her cell, staring fixedly into the void for long hours, like a prophet receiving a revelation. When Firdaus finally agrees to speak with the doctor, the doctor approaches Firdaus' cell door or literally in Arabic, "the gate of Paradise," and hears no other sound but her voice. Firdaus' narrative carries the authority of divine voice even as it is constrained within her imprisoning cell, signifying that while patriarchy assumes control over women's bodies, it cannot exercise dominance over her mind and spirit, nor most significantly, over her voice.

Though Firdaus' body is imprisoned as she awaits her execution, her voice recounts her story of the multiple violations of her body, and reflects "the common embodiment of the female condition" (Malti-Douglas 139) that she shares with the doctor. Firdaus' voice, which speaks with urgency and strength, is the voice of *testimonio* :

This presence of the voice, which we are meant to experience as the voice of a real rather than a fictional person, is the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated, a desire to impose oneself on an institution of power, from the position of the excluded or the marginal. (Beverly 96)¹³

Firdaus' voice, "defined first and foremost through her body" (Malti-Douglas 136), connects, once again, the authorship of the body to the authorship of language. Firdaus, however, can speak only through the doctor, who is simultaneously a member of the institution of power, and marginalized as a woman within that institution.

El Saadawi has been criticized not only for writing "against her sex" but also for catering to the prurient interests of westerners who fixate on cultural practices such as clitoridectomy as examples of Arab barbarism. The question of El Saadawi's complicity in hegemonic discourses is further complicated by the issue of gender, which, as I have discussed previously, has often been used to justify Western imperialist intervention to "save brown women." This critique of El Saadawi has been leveled by a number of Arab women, including Leila Ahmed, who describes El Saadawi's denunciation of Arab cultural attitudes toward women's bodies as

grounded in 'modern' or 'Western' medical and feminist thought, both of which share, and extend to women, the assumptions of the broader Western tradition of political thought as to the proper

physical integrity and political and personal autonomy of the individual.¹⁴

Ahmed's claim that "El Saadawi's text is informed by a Western consciousness" characterizes El Saadawi's "hybridization," an experience often representative of the bourgeois postcolonial intellectual, as one of assimilation to Western ways of thinking, and begs the question whether consciousness can be exclusively Western or more authentically Arab. But Ahmed, aware of El Saadawi's popularity in the West, voices a valid concern that El Saadawi's novels and her essays in The Hidden Face of Eve may provide Western audiences with a monolithic approach to how Arab women conceptualize the body and their position within Arab societies. Within the novel, however, the doctor confronts her position of privilege in relation to Firdaus; yet she casts this in terms of her social privilege, rather than in terms of her westernization. After hearing Firdaus' story, she is both empowered and ashamed. "I felt ashamed of myself, of my life, of my fears, and my lies" (108). In attempting to negotiate "with the structure of enabling violence" that produced her (although El Saadawi has roots in the peasant class herself), the doctor implicates herself in the system that condemns the prisoner to death, although she may not be aware of the multiple ways in which she participates in the system, even as she resists it.

Ahmed's concern about El Saadawi's appropriation by Western audiences addresses the larger issue of the way third world women's texts are received in the first world (Mukherjee 27). Perhaps because it was initially written for an Arab audiences who would have knowledge of the postcolonial corruption under Sadat, Woman at Point Zero focuses its attack against patriarchy and says little about the legacy of colonialism in Egypt. Still there are dangers in reading all postcolonial and third world literature

in terms of the colonizer/colonized binary, for such readings limit third world literatures to a kind of obsession with the West, and often fail to address the immediate concerns of their own societies. El Saadawi's reevaluation of the psychoanalytic relationship, however, is a direct critique of the applicability of Western theories to Arab women's lives.

Furthermore, in her articles and interviews, El Saadawi espouses a "revolutionary feminism" that is highly critical of the West and its continuing neocolonialist influence on the lives of Arab women ("Arab Women and Western Feminism" 177). She finds fault for women's oppression in "certain economic and political forces, namely those of foreign imperialism operating mainly from the outside, and reactionary classes operating from the inside" (Hidden Face of Eve 41). Therefore, while the novel focuses on the internal corruptions of Egyptian society, it also points to a larger imperialist system of corruption that extends beyond Arab society. In her critique of Arab gender relations, El Saadawi does not seek to excuse the oppressive patriarchal practices that plague Arab women's lives; rather she argues that the positive aspects of culture must "be sought for and emphasized. Negative aspects should be exposed and discarded without hesitation" (Hidden Face of Eve 212). However, it is up to Arab women themselves to define exploitative practices. Western cultural misreadings have relentlessly emphasized the negatives of Arab social structures. El Saadawi explains, "The colonizers tended to alienate us from our past and our history and to impose only the negative part of our history" ("Feminism in Egypt" 27). To reduce El Saadawi's work to a "man-hating" diatribe or to an exercise of Western consciousness is to ignore her blatant critique of the patriarchal class system as an outgrowth of Western imperialism, which oppresses women socially, politically, and economically

worldwide. Firdaus may be read as the attempt to assert a positive women's history, an empowering subjectivity, in the face of imperial and patriarchal dominance. Ironically, it is the prostitute herself who ultimately refuses to prostitute herself to imperialist interests and power.

Collective Voices and Shared Conditions

Like El Saadawi's novel, Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions (1988) operates as a collective story of women's experience with double protagonists from the colonized peasant and bourgeois classes, Tambudzai and Nyasha, respectively. Although the story takes place in pre-independence Rhodesia, the postcolonial narrative perspective critiques the patriarchal class system directly as an outgrowth of colonialism. In this sense, the novel portrays what El Saadawi implies through indirection--that gender and class oppression in (post)colonial countries have been fed by colonialist/imperialist ideology.¹⁵ While references to prostitution arise and are contested to signify how women, as sites of cultural impurity, attempt to gain control of their bodies and their sexuality, Nyasha suffers from another women's disease, *anorexia nervosa*, which serves as an internalization of and resistance to sexual oppression and colonial domination, and is symptomatic of the Western and class privileges she experiences as a cultural hybrid.

The novel begins with Tambu's "confession"--"I was not sorry when my brother died"(1) -- a statement that sets the theme of embattled genders and connects her "escape" from the poverty of rural life to her brother's death. The death of Nhamo, after all, opens up doors of opportunity for Tambu, who consequently moves in with her Uncle Babamukuru, her Aunt Maiguru, and cousin Nyasha, in their relatively affluent house at the

mission to attend the mission school. The polyvocality of the text as expressive of a collective women's experience resonates in Tambu's claim that her story is "about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion--Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful" (1). The question of the success of Nyasha's rebellion is left open, for although Nyasha's struggle reveals the limitations of women's resistance in (post)colonial society, Nyasha's rebellion enables Tambu's escape, much as Firdaus' execution enables El Saadawi's revelation.

Nervous Conditions acquires its title from Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, which states, "The colonial condition is a nervous condition." The effects of colonization permeate the text, which examines a plurality of nervous conditions, as the title suggests, especially sexual colonization resulting from the social construction of male privilege within African society. Tambudzai's coming of age story takes place within this context and charts the resistances of various female characters within her extended family to the multiple oppressions of sexism, racism, colonialism, and capitalism.

In considering the author's relationship to her characters, it is interesting to note that the autobiographical details of Dangarembga's life coincide most with Nyasha's, and that she employs Tambudzai as narrator as a distancing device,¹⁶ one that gives the peasant woman the dominant voice. Yet as in Woman at Point Zero, the narrative voice, and in this case, the postcolonial perspective, are shaped primarily by the bourgeois woman, Nyasha, much as Tambu is shaped by the teachings of her more worldly cousin. Tambu, for example, finds relief from the oppressions of rural poverty and gender hierarchy within the education system and her more

affluent life at the mission; her presence at the mission reminds Nyasha of her own class privilege, even as Nyasha recognizes the seductions of assimilation into the colonial education system and warns her cousin against them. Thus their resistances play off each other, and foreground the complexity of their situations. Tambu strongly identifies with her cousin Nyasha, and she describes their relationship as "my first love-affair" (78), saying how they look like sisters, "which is how I would have arranged matters had I been consulted" (92). As she comes under the influence of Nyasha's "multi-directional mind"(151), Tambu begins what she calls her "reincarnation" (92). Such a process also describes the intersubjectivity created when the author "reincarnates" herself in the voice of Tambu, the girl with her roots in the peasant class.

As Tambu admires and loves Nyasha, so Nyasha's well-being depends on Tambu. In contrast, in Woman at Point Zero, the doctor expresses a similar love and admiration for Firdaus, although the reverse is not true. It is significant then that, though from different classes, both Firdaus and Nyasha play similar roles as educators, and both pay a price for their knowledge with their bodies. Furthermore, both Nyasha and Firdaus go through a similar period of self-education, then share their knowledge with the other women. Firdaus, for example, says:

I developed a love of books . . . I got to know about the Persians, the Turks and the Arabs. I read about the crimes committed by kings and rulers, about wars, peoples, revolutions, and the lives of revolutionaries . . . I read about a ruler whose male servants and concubines were as numerous as his army, and about another whose only interests in life were wine, women, and whipping his slaves. A third cared little for women, but enjoyed wars, killing,

and torturing men . . . I discovered that all these rulers were men. What they had in common was an avaricious and distorted personality, a never-ending appetite for money, sex and unlimited power. (26-27)

Unlike Firdaus, however, who reduces power to an issue of gender and greed, Nyasha learns about the vast history of social injustice in terms of colonialism and imperialism, as Tambu describes:

She read a lot of books that were about real people, real peoples and their sufferings. The condition in South Africa . . . She read about Arabs on the east coast and the British on the west; about Nazis and Japanese and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She had nightmares about these things, the atrocities; but she carried on reading all the same, because, she said, you had to know the facts if you were ever going to find the solutions. She was certain the solutions were there. She wanted to know many things: whether the Jews' claim to Palestine was valid, whether monarchy was a just form of government, the nature of life and relations before colonisation . . . (93)

At this point, Nyasha is still at the stage of asking questions and has yet either to reach conclusions or to find the solutions to the injustices she learns about. Not until she internalizes her own oppression can she recognize its causes. Unlike Firdaus who attempts to explain her oppression and to gain self-definition through totalizing formulas, only to have them shattered one by one, Nyasha teaches Tambu that "blame does not come in neatly packaged parcels" (12). And yet Tambu, who experiences the injustices of gender in different ways than Nyasha (she is initially denied access to education, forced to work on the homestead, etc.), is more

condemning, less forgiving than Nyasha, whose multi-directional mind, as well as her privilege, allow her to see the complexity of her subjugation and the subjugation of those around her.

The other women's voices in Nervous Conditions, those of Tambu's mother Mainini, her sister Lucia, and Nyasha's mother, Maiguru, further confound women's position within colonial Rhodesia and Shona culture as they speak the entrapments and resistances of an older generation of women. Mainini, trapped by what she describes as "the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other" (16), is quick to find blame with the colonial "white wizards" who took her parents' land and destroyed her son, Nhamo, whom she slowly loses to the seductions of wealth, and finally to death. She sees Babamukuru as an agent of white wizardry because he is English educated and serves as a "mimic man" of the colonial government. Mainini reads Nyasha's anorexia as an illness of "Englishness" rather than of patriarchy, arguing, ". . . you couldn't expect the ancestors to stomach so much Englishness" (203). Mainini quietly accepts her position within the patriarchal structure of Shona society, yet her suppressed resistance manifests itself in another illness, chronic lethargy. Directing her resistance against her white colonial master, she speaks, along with Nyasha, most strongly for decolonization, but her diseased body bears the effects of her multiple oppressions.

For Mainini's sister, Lucia, resistance is more successful because she remains outside the bonds of marriage, the privileges of class, and traditional male control. She argues that she doesn't know how to obey a man because she isn't married (174), and Lucia uses her body and her sexuality as a means of achieving freedom and pleasure. When she takes up with Takesure, she does so of her own volition, because "her body had

appetites of which she was not ashamed" (153). Babamukuru comes to respect her and to heed her advice for he applauds her as being "like a man herself" (171), a conclusion he reaches because she is the only woman in the family who controls her body and her livelihood, even in defiance of his authority. Her sexual liberation threatens the patriarchal system of control, and is contrasted to Nyasha's sexual containment under Babamukuru's strict rule.

Nyasha's refusal to swallow her father's patriarchal control coincides with her refusal to stomach her Anglicization, complicating the terms of her resistance. Both Firdaus and Nyasha beg the question whether rebellion is successful when it leads to self-destruction. Nyasha, however, is not a martyr, nor is she merely a victim, and her struggle represents that the destruction of the individualized self is detrimental to the collective women's project, for as Tambu says of her cousin's illness, "Nyasha's progress was still in the balance, and so, as a result, was mine" (202). The simultaneity of individualization and collectivity of voices coalescing throughout the text suggest that a healthy women's community relies on the well-being of its individual members, as well as the ability of women to unite across class lines to cure the ills of the community.

When the women come together to decide how to deal with the Shona patriarchal system of justice (which is unjust), Tambu describes the group as divided by fear. The myths that divided them as women, and therefore diffused their power as a group, were created by fear, which made them "retreat more resolutely into their own roles" (138). Like the doctor who must relinquish her role of authority in order to hear Firdaus, Tambu suggests that the women of her family need to "broaden out," to consider the perspectives of the other women for an "encompassing expansion and

growth" (138). Maiguru, Babamukuru's wife and a highly educated woman, for example, does not want to involve herself in what she considers Lucia's base behaviors. Her own class privilege sets her above the other women, and yet it constricts her ability to rebel. As Babamukuru's wife, she has the choice between self and security and opts for the latter because of her resignation to the obligation to her family, as well as the comforts of privilege he provides. Her attempt at "saving herself," as Nyasha calls it, by leaving her husband signifies to her daughter the possibility of escaping Babamukuru's control. Upon her return home, Maiguru seems to have gained her husband's respect and is granted a greater say in the decisions of the household, implying that it may be possible to transform the system from within, that security and selfhood are not necessarily incompatible, and that some forms of self-redemption require compromise.

Nyasha, who can find no compromise nor healthy method of escape, effectively transforms her body into a site of rebellion, and in doing so, nearly destroys herself. The short dresses she wears upon her family's return from England and afterward signify a kind of threatening sexuality to her father and the community, and even elicit the disapproval of Tambu who describes her cousin as self-conscious, forgetful of her Shona ways and language, and intense. Ironically, when Tambu moves to Babamukuru's, she revels in the leisure "to consider questions that had to do with survival of the spirit, the creation of consciousness, rather than mere sustenance of the body" (59); and yet Nyasha, who possesses all the material benefits of her class, in the end cannot sustain her body. As Tambu prospers through the educational opportunities provided by Babamukuru's wealth, Nyasha becomes entrapped by her father who "condemns her to whoredom" (115) and insists on his absolute authority over her. Through her bulimia and

anorexia nervosa, a condition with its roots in the denial of sexuality and the attempt to gain control of one's body, Nyasha makes Babamukuru her slave, because he cannot control what she eats or what she will stomach of his authority. At the pinnacle of her rebellion, she shreds between her teeth her English history book, calling them "fucking liars;" she jabs into her flesh the fragments of her clay pots, representing her "native" art; and she tramples the clothes of her wardrobe underfoot (201). In this "scene," she rejects colonial history which has fragmented her culture, and along with the Shona patriarchal traditions, has scarred her flesh; and she refuses her material privileges gained by colonialism's capitalist system. When Nyasha is finally taken to a psychiatrist, he insists "that Nyasha could not be ill, that Africans did not suffer in the way we had described. She was making a scene" (201). As a cultural hybrid, Nyasha has acquired a "Western disease" that the white psychiatrist (because of his racism) refuses to recognize in her; rather, her illness is read as "a scene," a performance, much like anti-colonial rebellion.

What Babamukuru fails to acknowledge is that his daughter's disease is a manifestation of and rebellion against both his patriarchal control and his collaboration with the colonizer. Because he himself has relinquished in significant ways his Shona traditions, he expects Nyasha to bear the burden of that tradition, particularly through her sexuality. Nyasha, however, blames her hybrid condition on her parents, who took her and her brother to England while they received their educations: ". . . now they're stuck with hybrids for children. And they don't like it . . . They think we do it on purpose, so it offends them" (78). Unlike her father, who is trained to collude with the British because he is "cultivable, in the way that land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator" (19), Nyasha

refuses to sustain the colonial cultivator, her father, and ultimately herself, through her illness. She rejects her father's ideology that Christian ways are progressive, saying, "It's bad enough when the country gets colonised, but when the people do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end" (147). In drawing a parallel between Babamukuru and the country, Nervous Conditions subverts the colonialist metaphor of woman as colonized land and exposes the male elite's collaboration in the colonial process. Although Nyasha's nervous condition, like prostitution for El Saadawi, is emblematic of patriarchal and imperialist systems of control, Dangarembga sharpens her criticism of the systems by deploying the disease itself as a form of rebellion, a refusal to be mastered. Nyasha refuses "to grovel" to her father, much as Firdaus refuses to be a slave to her pimp. This fighting back is part of the process of claiming a "self," part of what Tambu calls the "painful process . . . of expansion" beyond the borders of gender, race, and class hierarchies.

Third World Texts in First World Contexts

Both the novels that I have discussed argue for the universal oppression of women, across class lines as well as across national boundaries, even as they situate the gender conflict within the specific contexts of history and culture. But how does such an argument translate from these "third world" texts into a "first world" context? And how can we negotiate, like the bourgeois women in the novels, the "structures of enabling violence" that produce us as first world readers? For as the bourgeois characters/authors are divided from their rural sisters by class and by their hybridization, we as Western readers are divided from these women by our first world privilege, which can translate into our complicity

in multiple forms of violence against postcolonial women, not the least of which occur in the translation of these texts across worlds.

The Western tendency to read third world women's experience exclusively in terms of their victimization is thwarted by both texts, which assert both the strength of third world women and the universal oppression of women. In Woman at Point Zero, for example, one character states that the doctor and the prostitute are similar, "except that a doctor in carrying out his (*sic*) duties feels he's worthy of respect" (70). Firdaus also concludes that "all women are prostitutes of one kind or another" (91), in other words, they all pay for their subservient status within the patriarchal class system in differing ways. Similarly, Tambu says

The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had though it depended on . Men took it with them everywhere . . . But what I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (115-116)

Although claims to the universal oppression among women call to mind simplistic formulas of global sisterhood, in the first world context, these universal claims to women's oppression are often interpreted as universally Arab or universally African, rather than as transcending cultural borders. The focus on gender oppression, as Chandra Mohanty writes, reinforces the notion that the third world is less evolved, particularly in its treatment of women ("Under Western Eyes" 72).

After reading critiques of El Saadawi, I have come to question how these novels, within the context of the first world, become complicit in hegemonic discourses of racism and imperialism. El Saadawi's novel was

after all originally written in Arabic, and was translated eight years later by her husband, Sherif Hetata, into English. Unlike Nervous Conditions, it relentlessly condemns gender oppression and offers no excuse for patriarchal oppression, although it finds greatest fault with corrupt rulers. Firdaus, unlike Tambu or Nyasha, cannot escape the material limitations of her class position; thus the hope for her freedom lies only in the fact that she is willing to die for what she believes in. Tambu, however, does escape the limitations of her gender and class through her uncle's economic opportunities; and Nyasha attributes her own oppression to a complex matrix of powers, including colonial rule, which victimizes her father as well:

Do you see what they've done? They've taken us away. Lucia. Takesure. All of us. they've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. We're grovelling. Lucia for a job, Jeremiah for money. Daddy grovels to them. We grovel to him . . . I won't grovel, I won't die. (200)

Because Dangarembga's novel examines these complex relations of oppression, I believe, it translates more easily across cultures. But El Saadawi's novel may be expanded by an understanding of its historical context, which speaks to the ways in which capitalism and imperialism have distorted Arab societies. Although it may be limiting to read all third world literatures as anti-imperialist, it is nonetheless important for Western readers to interrogate our privilege in order to understand the violence that we do to third world women, both in real political terms, and through our interpretation of their experience. The testimonial quality of both Woman at Point Zero and Nervous Conditions asserts a collective, revolutionary consciousness, one in which the

reader is invited to participate. As Doris Sommer argues, "testimonials are written so as to produce complicity in the reader. Thus, they are fundamentally about constructing relationships between the self and the reader, in order to invite and precipitate change (revolution)."¹⁷ When we, as first world readers, implicate ourselves within these systems of power, much as the bourgeois postcolonial authors do, we participate in the collective work of revolution and in the painful process of expansion necessary for understanding and solidarity across the cultural divide.

Notes to Chapter 8: On the Bodies of Third World Women

¹Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga conducted by Fiona Lloyd. Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, 1989. Quoted in Lindsay Pentolfe-Aegerter, "You have Met the Woman; You have Struck the Rock: Southern African Women's Writing," diss., U of Washington, 1992, 49. Special thanks to Lindsay for her guidance and resources in this study. Also thanks to Ruth Levine, who recently returned from a year in Zimbabwe and shared information as well a number of books with me.

²The use of conventional narrative forms may be an effective strategy here. For example, Nawal El Saadawi has explained that she employs familiar rather than literary language so that she may reach a broader, popular audience with her writing. Also, by describing these two novels as conventional in form, I do not mean to suggest that all third world women are writing in what are considered "conventional" forms. Nor do I agree with Frederic Jameson's limited definition of third world literature as "national allegory" that employs conventional western narrative genres. See "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," 65-88. Some third world women writers who are using innovative forms and languages include Etel Adnan (discussed in chapter 6 of this work) and Fadia Faqir (*Nisanit*, New York: Penguin, 1987), among others.

³Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "French Feminism Revisited," *Feminists Theorize the Political*, 58. Spivak here elaborates on Marnia Lazreg's argument presented in "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria" that "individual women from the [third world] appear on the feminist stage as representatives of the millions of women in their own societies. to what extent they do violence to the women they claim authority to write and speak about is a question that is seldom raised" (89).

⁴In *African Laughter*, Lessing explains how *Nervous Conditions* was rejected by four Zimbabwe publishers, and was not published within the country until Women's Press in London first published it. According to Lessing, it was "criticized by male critics as being 'negative,' and presenting an unfair picture of the lives of black women" (423).

⁵al-Sayyid Marsot explains the impact of British colonization on traditional Arab life in *A Short History of Modern Egypt*. She argues that the increase in prostitution, particularly among poor women, angered the Muslim Brotherhood, who challenged the Wafd party's [a secular nationalist group] collaboration with British occupation (100).

⁶I use the term "feminist" here, although it is important to clarify that this term is not commonly used in the Arab world. As El Saadawi herself says, "Feminism to us is a very English word. We call it women's liberation [*tahrir al-ma'rah*] because we don't have feminism in Arabic. Women's liberation means the liberation from class and patriarchal oppression." See "The Progressive Interview: Nawal el-Saadawi," 32-35.

⁷See also al-Sāyyid Marsot, A Short History of Modern Egypt, 138. It is a notable fact that Sadat was championed by the U.S. as a great leader and his government highly subsidized and supported by U.S. government funds and policies. Marsot writes that Sadat's assassination in 1981 "moved the United States government and its people as though it had lost one of its own, [but] it barely moved the Egyptians" (140).

⁸Reza Hammami and Martina Reiker, "Feminist Orientalism or Orientalist Marxism," 101. Hammami and Reiker here are referring to "the subaltern woman" a definition that aptly fits Firdaus.

⁹Halim Barakat, for example, has described the defiant female protagonist of Layla Ba'albakkī's *Ana Ahya* (I live), as "deeply rooted in her egotistic assertion of individual freedom . . . almost to the exclusion of social reality" See Roger Allen, The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction, 86.

¹⁰I am reminded here of Hortense Spillers' concept of the black woman as "vestibular" to culture (See "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," and my discussion of Spillers in chapter 1). Although for Spillers, this concept is generally negative, particularly in the dominant culture's appropriation of black women's sexuality, in Firdaus' story, she becomes a "way in," precisely because the doctor (and reader) must reject her own dominant position in order to gain "access" to Firdaus' story.

¹¹Thanks to Terri De Young for pointing out these details in class.

¹²As Leila Ahmed points out, Sufism was the one branch of Islam that offered women equality with men, and sometimes stressed women's superior attributes. See Women and Gender in Islam, 95-98.

¹³In his essay, "The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio," John Beverly describes Woman at Point Zero as a *testimonio novel* because it fulfills his definition of *testimonio*, but has been "extensively reworked, with explicitly literary goals"(105).

¹⁴See Leila Ahmed, "Arab Culture and the Writing of Women's Bodies," Feminist Issues (Spring 1989), 41. It is interesting to note that in her more recent text, Women and Gender in Islam (1992), Ahmed praises El Saadawi, saying that "no writer has played a more important and eloquent role than [she]" in exposing the hidden abuses of women and in challenging the misogynist and andocentric practices of Arab culture (215). Yet, she still critiques El Saadawi for her adherence to Western notions of individualism.

¹⁵See, for example, Michael Bourdillon, The Shona People (Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987). In this work, Bourdillon asserts, "It is a common misconception that women had little or no status in traditional African societies." He shows how through the influence of colonialism and the

growth of capitalism, women's social standing, which formally depended on her ancestral lineage has diminished. Yet while woman has lost status within her kinship group, she has received some compensation "from her rising status as a housewife in control of her own home" (50-51).

¹⁶Flora Veit-Wild. Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature. Doctoral Dissertation, 1990. To be published by Baobab and Hansell, cited in Pentolfe-Aegerter, 88.

¹⁷Doris Sommer, "Not Just a Personal Story: Women's Testimonios and the Plural Self," qtd. in Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," 37,

**Chapter 9: The Third World as Insurgent Ground
and Contested Territories Among Arab Feminists**

This problematizing of gender places her [the African-American woman], in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining *insurgent* ground as female social subject.

--Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"

Constructing histories of third world feminisms often requires reading against the grain of a number of intersecting progressive discourses (e.g. white feminist, third world nationalist, and socialist) as well as the politically repressive racist, imperialist, sexist discourses of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary capitalism.

--Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle"

Although U.S. feminists have sought to define and carve out a space in which to ground their criticism, "Eastern" feminists have simply adjusted their inquiry to fill the blanks in the geographical distribution made available to them by U.S. feminist liberalism.

--Marnia Lazreg, "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of writing as a woman on women in Algeria"

Whether we enter upon the terrain of third world women through literature or theory, through the lived experience of subaltern women or the writings of bourgeois feminists, we often find ourselves standing on what Hortense Spillers calls "*insurgent ground*." In seeking "a place for the different female social subject," Spillers theorizes this space as a strategy for rewriting "a radically different text for a female empowerment" ("Mama's Baby" 80). Both U.S. and global third world feminism suggest a new radical terrain of feminist theory, a space in which feminists might transform oppressive hierarchical structures and theorize collective effort to restructure both personal relationships and relationships of the state. This terrain belongs particularly to women whose "oppositional consciousness"

(Sandoval) grows out of lived encounters with racism, colonialism, and imperialism. Yet, it also provides a ground for theorizing sex and gender along with race, ethnicity, and class that may serve to bridge the gap of "difference" that has divided feminist movements from within, and has erected serious obstacles to global feminist alliances.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that at the 1980 "Women's Mid-Decade Meeting" in Copenhagen, Western feminists engaged in the same critiques of third world women that colonialist fetishization and exoticism exploited--clitoridectomy, veiling, polygamy, the harem.¹ Many third world representatives, including Nawal El Saadawi, were irate at this fascination with sexuality divorced from its economic or political context, and accused Western feminists of promoting ethnocentric concepts of feminism. Yet it is true that such modes of sexual oppression have often blocked third world women's involvement in the political realm, and that resistance and denial around any political analysis of sexuality could lead to "the silencing of the female body as a whole" (Accad, "Sexuality and Sexual Politics" 240). As we learn from the stories of Firdaus in Women at Point Zero and Nyasha in Nervous Conditions, any analysis of third world women's struggles must factor in the effects of colonialism, imperialism, and global capitalism, as well as sexual oppression, on their lives. These factors, however, often become "veiled" by analyses of "gendered femaleness" or reductionary theories of global sisterhood.²

In this chapter, I examine the advantages and limitations of some formulations put forth by U.S. third world feminists, and their implications specifically for Arab feminism. I use these theories to delineate between what I see as two dominant trends in Arab feminism within U.S. academia: scholarship that focuses nearly exclusively on gender relations and

embraces Orientalist stereotypes of Arab society to argue for Western models of Arab women's liberation; and oppositional scholarship that factors in the multiple forces of oppression on Arab women's lives. For this analysis, I am concerned primarily with Arab women who write in English and have gained at least some (although minimal) circulation within U.S. academia. As an Arab American feminist, I often write and speak from this academic setting, where the forces of Orientalizing discourses still hold much power. For oppositional Arab feminists who challenge the assumption that Western feminist models apply directly to their lives, the writings by U.S. third world feminists who have widely questioned academic feminist practices provide a useful point of entry. Many Arab feminists find themselves engaged in similar tactical maneuvers to preserve some aspects of their culture in the face of Western modes of domination as they struggle to carve out a space within global feminism.

As the problem exists of presenting a homogeneous, consolidated, essentialized third world woman, so, too, it is dangerous to conceive of Arab women (or Middle Eastern women) monolithically, given that they come from over twenty different countries, situated on or near the borders of three continents, and from a variety of economic, religious, and educational backgrounds. Algerian feminist Marnia Lazreg asserts that given the heterogeneity of the region, "we should refrain from thinking in terms of a 'Middle East' and realize that what is useful to geopolitics is not necessarily so to sociology" (95). In order to engage with the multiplicity of Arab women's experiences, Lazreg argues for a "phenomenology of women's lived experience to explode the constraining power of categories" (95). This impulse to let third world women speak for themselves has produced a burgeoning number of ethnographies and collections of interviews,

particularly, but not exclusively, on women in the Middle East.³ The popularity of such books attests to a growing interest in these women's experiences, as well as the move away from authoritative, anthropological analyses of third world women. Within these interviews and stories, we see how women step back from their daily actions to analyze their situations and strategies, and formulate theories in order to bring about liberatory changes in their lives.

These personal stories lay the ground for theoretical insights into the struggles of Arab women. Given the heterogeneity of Arab women's experience, it may be impossible to formulate an encompassing theory "that will take into account the individual characters that different forms of feminism have taken in the Middle East" (Sabbagh 34); yet an interrogation of the various theories set forth by Arab feminists in the past decade should begin to address how these feminisms connect to their specific geographical and historical contexts, even as they suggest alliances between Arab feminists. While the outcome of the Copenhagen mid-Decade conference revealed how Western feminists had failed to address the effects of racism, colonialism, and global capitalism on third world women's lives; many white feminists, and some Arabs as well, still either ignore or reject nationalist and religious movements (particularly Islam) as inherently incompatible with feminism, thereby alienating many Arab women from Western conceptions of feminism. As Palestinian feminist Rita Giacaman says, "In classical western feminist theory, nowhere will you find a serious analysis of the national question" (37). And Muslim feminist Fatima Mernissi has written,

Islam alone is condemned by many Westerners as blocking the way to women's rights. And yet, though neither

Christianity nor Judaism played an important role in promoting equality of the sexes, millions of Jewish and Christian women today enjoy a dual privilege--full human rights on the one hand and access to an inspirational religious tradition on the other. (The Veil and the Male Elite vi).

U.S. third world feminist theories, however, offer a means by which these "differences" may be included within a global feminist perspective. Furthermore, by drawing connections between U.S. third world feminism and Arab feminism, I hope to bring Arab women's issues out of their seclusion within Middle East departments into wider feminist circles.

Terrains, Spaces, and Grounds of Resistance

In "U.S. Third World Feminism," Chela Sandoval, like Spillers, expresses concern with the failure of hegemonic feminist theory to make a place for women of color. Although Sandoval does not claim global application for her model, her argument, which posits a feminism based on a differential theory that allows for shifting and multiple positions and strategies, offers a new way of theorizing feminism and resistance that may extend beyond the limits of postmodern U.S. culture. According to Sandoval, the place created by U.S. women of color themselves working against and within dominant ideology, is this insurgent ground, a "psychic terrain" of oppositional consciousness, which may be inhabited not merely by U.S. third world female social subjects, but also by white feminists, and other marginalized subjects who are concerned with opposing dominant ideology. Similarly, Chandra Mohanty theorizes an "'imagined community' of third world oppositional struggles . . . [that] suggests the potential alliances and

collaborations across divisive boundaries;" and that is committed to oppositional, liberation movements which she describes as inescapably linked with feminist movements ("Cartographies" 4,13). Both Sandoval and Mohanty connect feminism with other liberation movements: Sandoval reads the phases of U.S. white feminist strategies as "sublimated versions" of "oppositional consciousness expressed within all liberation movements active in the United States during the later half of the twentieth century" (3); and Mohanty describes third world women's insistence on "this inescapable link between feminist and political liberation movements" as the challenge posed to white, Western feminists ("Cartographies" 10). Taken together, Sandoval's and Mohanty's formulations point to third world feminism's inherent ties to liberation struggles as the model by which white feminism and other oppositional theories might restructure themselves. In the context of the Middle East, where liberation movements have often assumed either nationalist or Islamicist ideologies, Arab feminist must negotiate within these ideologies, even as they participate in transforming nationalist or religious structures. Because Sandoval's model allows for movement within two or more seemingly contradictory positions, it offers a means of theorizing a nationalist or Islamic feminism, or even a feminist nationalism or a feminist Islam, that does not preclude an international coalition.

Sandoval's proposed theory of oppositional consciousness allows her to draw connections between seemingly disparate social and political aims which drive and "divide liberation movements from within"(3). Her model, based on what she terms the five effective modes of "oppositional consciousness" that "press against" the dominant order, posits four modes that grew out of post-1950's U.S. liberation movements and parallel the four

phases of hegemonic feminism--liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist--as well as a fifth mode of "differential consciousness." Sandoval categorizes the first four modes as "equal rights," "revolutionary," "cultural," and "separatist" in their original forms (12-13).

A similar correlation exists between liberation movements and emergent feminisms in the Arab world, where women's access to the political realm often heightened their awareness of their struggles as women. These phases may be applied and revised to fit the decolonizing movements in the Middle East and North Africa to understand how liberation struggles have politicized women, even as they have constrained their modes of resistance. In this context, the "equal rights" phase was often quickly supplanted by a "revolutionary" phase, when the colonized recognized the impossibility of attaining equal rights under the presence of the colonizing power. Although in Algeria, the revolution took the form of an extended armed struggle, in other Arab countries, including Egypt, decolonization resulted from internal political protests, armed attacks on British officials, and some external political pressures.

The "cultural phase" defines both Arab nationalist and religious movements, which have sought to assert the positive values and contributions of Arab culture and/or Islamic societies above Western ways. As I discussed in chapter one, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century nationalism operated under the leadership of a Western-educated, male elite who tended to embrace Western cultural practices as a model for social progress; whereas Islamicists, often speaking for the "masses," tended to reject westernization outright. "Separatism," which had its adherents in both Arab nationalist and Islamic religious movements, "is organized to protect and nurture the differences that define it through complete

separation from the dominant social order" (Sandoval 13). In the 1950's and 60's, Egyptian-President Gamal Abdel Nasser advocated an Arab nationalism based on socialist reforms, including limiting land ownership, and attaining economic independence from Western markets which had "penetrated" and controlled Egypt's economy (as well as the Suez canal) since well before the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. Yet, not all separatist movements are socialist. For example, although the Iranian revolution was founded on socialist economic and political reform, post-revolutionary Iran is based on a mode of religious, cultural, and economic separatism designed to protect the Islamic state from the influences of Western imperialism. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also seeks to maintain a separate Islamic culture by adhering to often out-moded traditions, despite its political and economic embroilment with the U.S. military industrial complex, which maintains a strong presence in the Arabian peninsula to protect "its" oil resources. These Arab "liberation" movements, which have varied from country to country, invariably position themselves counter to or in collusion with Western economic and military interests in the region, and thereby often inscribe their own modes of repression for women and the peasant classes.

Although Sandoval's theory relies upon the limiting constraints of categories, I find these categories useful in attempting to define the movements within Arab feminism. Because Arab women's liberation has been dependent on women's access to the political realm, its situatedness within the political/historical contexts of anti-colonialist, nationalist, and Islamicist liberation movements both define and delimit women's resistance. However, as Arab women's consciousness was raised through active political participation, the "equal rights" phase was often neglected for more immediate political concerns. The Algerian War of Independence provides

one example of how women who actively participated in the liberation struggle were forced to return to their tradition roles after independence, purportedly in support of the national interest.

Identity politics, so prevalent in nationalist and Islamicist movements, is both complemented and subverted by Sandoval's fifth and crucial phase of "differential consciousness." As a politics of strategy rather than identity, this differential phase, allows for, even demands, movement among any of these identifications or methods. This movement cannot be measured, but rather is an "ideological and tactical weaponry for confronting shifting currents of power" (20). Furthermore, this differential movement produces a new form of subjectivity, what Sandoval describes as, "a political revision that denies any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to recenter depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted" (14). Like the gaps, junctures, interstices that occur as sites of opposition, the differential process suggests another uncharted "site" of resistance, but avoids the fixity of a "site" (or identity) as a process rather than location-oriented mode of resistance. The differential phase is not insurgent *ground*, but rather "insurgent *movement*" (14, my emphasis) between various sites of resistance, which "provides grounds for alliance with other decolonizing movements for emancipation" (4).

Sandoval may, however, too quickly reconcile these oppositional strategies with their intended effect, claiming that the differential process "produces justice" (14); for although this appears to be a logical claim, we are never really clear why this should be so, when a differential process could, in fact, produce an endless number of possible effects. One disadvantage her theory cannot accommodate (though Sandoval acknowledges it), is the process of hierarchization within U.S. and global third world feminist

movements. This disparity in power can be apprehended sometimes along class lines, as in the case of the bourgeois feminist and the subaltern women, sometimes along racial lines, sometimes along ideological lines, as I will show in my discussion of Arab feminism.

Another disadvantage to her theory, particularly within the context of global third world struggles, is the fixity of nationalist or religious movements which have not always allowed women to move between positions of resistance as easily as Sandoval suggests. Written for its U.S. context, Sandoval's differential theory may in fact imply a level of "freedom" of mobility that does not always exist for third world women globally. But as nationalist struggles themselves are transformed by the conditions of the postmodern world (and here I am thinking of the Palestinian independence struggle as it is played out over CNN and in the forum of an "international peace conference"), nationalist strategies too have become multiple and differential, so that this matrix of non-privileged strategies provide more potential for transforming oppressive hierarchical structures. Yet, I would question whether Sandoval's theory of movement assumes certain privileges of mobility that might not exist for many third world peoples.

Sandoval's model theorizes a way around the bind third world women often find themselves in, described by Algerian feminist, Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas: "caught between two legitimacies: belonging to our people or identifying with other oppressed women" (113). However, the common paralysis between these two positions suggests that although differential consciousness allows the mind to wander freely where it will, in terms of lived experience, women are often bound to particular allegiances that remain fixed hierarchically within their communities.

In a context where this mobility of identity is a feasible maneuver, however, Sandoval's theory solves the problem inherent in identity politics and its paralyzing tendency to fix people into positions that create divisions even as they build solidarities. In Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said writes, "'identity' does not necessarily imply ontologically given and eternally determined stability, or uniqueness, or irreducible character, or privileged status as something total and complete in and of itself" (315). Said suggests that nationalism be constructed in terms of liberation rather than in terms of identity, a limited tactic that serves "to homogenize and isolate populations" (299), even as it places the burden of identity onto women as the symbolic bearers of the nation. The limitation, then, of identity politics, or nationalist and Islamicist discourses lies in the emphasis on "identity, over and above knowing about others," (Said 299) and in forming solidarities with them.⁴

In the move of women of color "from margin to center," Sandoval's model further circumvents the danger of Western feminists becoming once again the "true subjects" of discourses on difference. If the Deleuzian model of "becoming-Third world" is taken to its extreme, any subject might inhabit this third world position regardless of her lived experience of oppression. But since "differential consciousness" is not a position of identity, but a movement, Sandoval's model avoids this trap of appropriation inherent in the problem of changing positions with an-other .

For women who have to fight battle on many fronts and with a double-edged sword, this shifting between various positions, while acknowledging the links between them, is "a survival skill well-known to the oppressed" (Hooks, Margin 9). Differential consciousness, then, is not a strategy of moving between identifications of race, class, gender, or sexual preference,

but rather of movement between and among various tactics of resistance. This movement has been particularly critical for both U.S and global third world feminists who find different strategies of identification and resistance more effective with various audiences and with shifting sites of oppression.

Among Arab Feminists: Arab Culture and Islam

"Feminism" as a term does not belong to the Arab world, for no such word exists in the Arabic language. Yet *tahrir al-ma'rah* (women's liberation) has a long history, as some have suggested, over a century of struggle.⁵ Although the word "feminism" has been borrowed from the West (and sometimes used, sometimes rejected by Arab women)⁶, "women's liberation" is not borrowed, but rather part of what Spivak calls "indigenous global feminism" which "must still reckon with the bitter legacy of imperialism transformed in decolonization" ("French Feminism Revisited" 54). The Arab women's movement includes multiple forms of "feminism," some of which have formed friendlier alliances than others. Many of the debates that occur between and among Arab feminists are played out on the pages of journals and reviews, usually of Middle Eastern studies, rarely transgressing these departmental boundaries. As I discussed in chapter six (154), Arab women, in large part, remain secluded from wider feminist discussions that occur within U.S. academia.

Further examination of the many perspectives of Arab women involved in feminist struggles, as well as other liberation movements, may contribute to the expansion of existing categories and methods set forth by U.S. feminist academic discourse. In approaching the two dominant trends within Arab feminism, I will expose the limitations of theories that focus nearly exclusively on gender relations and embrace Western feminist

models for Arab women's liberation; and examine new models of oppositional scholarship that factor in the multiple forces of oppression on Arab women's lives. While I do not want to dismiss the former theories outright by adhering to the obvious limitations of this binarism, it is important to remember that the field of Middle Eastern Studies has its roots in Orientalist studies, a mode of scholarship that collaborates with dominant social structure in its narrow focus on the failings of Arab-Islamic culture. Certainly, the theories put forth by Arab feminists are much more complex than these categories imply, and tend to reflect class consciousness, religious or secularist convictions, the political conditions of their given countries, as well as nationalist or internationalist sentiments. Often working within the constraining framework of Western imperialism, Arab women have had to maneuver quite adroitly between, among, or against a number of ideologies, revealing the potentials of "differential consciousness" for Arab feminists. I find Sandoval's theory useful, not only for negotiating the tight corners and limited spaces offered Arab women, but also for understanding the possibilities of alliances between Arab and other third world feminists. However, before attempting to negotiate alliances, we must first chart the contested territories among Arab feminists.

A debate carried out on the pages of the New Left Review in 1988 exemplifies some of the differences among Arab feminists, even among those who consider themselves "Marxist" in their approach. In "Feminism --or the Eternal Masculine--in the Arab World," Mai Ghossoub asserts that change within Arab world is impossible due to the "Eternal Masculine" of Islam, which she describes as an "all encompassing, dominating reality" (4). Ghossoub argues that Arab feminists and socialists have failed to

confront the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism that operates "not only [as] a code of belief, but [as] a system of identity" (4). Her concern with Islam as a fixed system of identification, however, ignores the ways in which Islam, particularly in association with fundamentalism, has become fixed as an evil in the Western mind.⁷ In the context of U.S. academia, it is important to understand how these two modes of "fixed identity"--fundamentalist Islam and Western imperialism--operate in conjunction, as tactics that reinforce one another, by disallowing any recognition of the other.⁸ Ghousoub also critiques Islam for conflating imperialist and nationalist secularist movements, by defining imperialism in terms of Western civilization rather than as "a form of the capitalist mode of production" (4). While this may be true of the most reactionary forms of Islam, Ghousoub fails to account for Islam's many schools of thought, some of which are critical of Western economic and political control. Because Ghousoub sees Islam itself as inherently incompatible with her brand of Marxism, she fails both to account for subaltern women in the Middle East, who are generally Muslim, and to factor in the effects of the West on Arab women's lives.

In their response, "Feminist Orientalism or Orientalist Marxism," Reza Hammami and Martina Reiker accuse Ghousoub of Orientalizing the Arab world by totalizing the power of Islam, and miring Middle Eastern feminism in "debates that were formed in nineteenth century travel literature" (93). (I have discussed these debates in chapter one of this work). In pointing a finger at Islam as the enemy of women, and ascribing to it a number of the stereotypes prevalent in Western discourse, Ghousoub engages in a particularly damaging strategy, because, as Hammami and Reiker state, Islam in the Western mind assumes the position

of some "'collective consciousness' as the main determinant in Middle Eastern history" (93). Religious ideology does not, however, determine culture as much as it is used by those in power to reinforce their positions, as El Saadawi explains: "What you do find is that governments and politicians invariably pick from religion what suits them and use it to justify their position" ("Arab Women and Western Feminism" 176). Rather than analyzing the political manipulations of religious law, Ghousoub subsumes politics under Islam and completely rejects Islam as "the eternal masculine" defect of the Arab world.

Hammami and Rieker, in contrast, define Islam as necessary to a Marxist reading of Arab culture, which must account for the subaltern (Muslim) woman. They describe Ghousoub as a "bourgeois feminist," even an "anti-feminist," who ignores the role of imperialism, capitalism, and class in women's oppression. Their Marxist approach includes the application of concepts, "such as class, mode of production, exploitations, ideological process and imperialism;" (101) as well as an analysis centered on the subaltern woman, whom Ghousoub overlooks from her position of privilege. In fact, they argue for a subaltern "consciousness" to understand how struggle occurs not only in political movements (many of which exclude subaltern women), but in the "practices of everyday life" (102). Their formulation of a "subaltern consciousness" in many ways mirrors Sandoval's "oppositional consciousness," suggesting that an oppositional third world perspective must not operate from a position of elitism. Hammami and Reiker call for an interrogation of the very categories which Ghousoub as well as others have used to study Middle Eastern women (93); and they assert that any analysis must be grounded in the dynamics of the historical moment, rather than within static concepts

of Islam and the family (101). In her reply, Ghoussoub retorts that Hammami and Reiker run "a risk of joining up with a paralysing third-worldism" (107), thereby reinscribing the binary of western modern progressivism and third world primitivism. Ghoussoub concludes that "the development of an Arab feminism will be anguishing and dangerous" (15), as this debate may well testify. But in positing a solitary and unified Arab feminism that depends on complete rejection of Islam and its cultural heritage, Ghoussoub reiterates colonialist arguments and dismisses the possibility of feminist Islamic perspectives that are working to transform religious and state structures.

In another debate reminiscent of the one between Western and third world feminists at the Copenhagen Mid-Decade Conference cited above, Evelyn Accad describes a conflict at the "Common Differences" conference (1983) between women who privileged sexuality and male domination in their approach, and those who privileged class and imperialism. Accad places herself in the former category and critiques the others, mainly Marxists, who, she argues, relegated sexuality to a secondary issue in the face of basic economic needs ("Sexuality and Sexual Politics" 238). According to Accad, these Marxists accused U.S. lesbians of "overemphasizing sex," because they may have failed to interrogate the patriarchal discourse from which they spoke (239). Accad's insistence on making sexuality central to the social and political analysis of the Middle East, and the Marxist's insistence on the centrality of economic conditions-- Freud vs. Marx--show how both parties remain "trapped inside a drive for truth which can only end in producing its own brand of domination" (Sandoval 14). This drive for domination is evident in the fact that the

debate pressured other participants into "taking sides," and some women even left the conference (Accad 244).

Although some third world feminists have characterized concerns with sexuality as a luxury, given the political and economic conditions of their lives⁹; Accad's claim that "sexuality must be recognized as an important element . . . in struggles for revolutionary change" (238) is undeniable. Yet by insisting on the centrality of sexuality to *all* power relations in the Middle East, she effectively participates, like the Marxists she critiques, in the struggle against oppression on only one front and with a single-edged consciousness. I mention Accad's argument because I believe it is significant that she is unfortunately the only Arab feminist given voice in the widely circulated anthology, Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism. Her essay, "Sexuality and Sexual Politics" included in this collection, and its elaboration in her book, Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East (1990), deserve some attentive dismantling.

In this text, Accad further develops her thesis on the revolutionary potential of sexuality, particularly within the context of her native Lebanon, which has been ravaged (at the time of publication) by fifteen years of civil war. She posits sexuality as the primary cause of the war, for the country is "dominated by Islamo-Arab influences . . . [and] carries the codes of honor and women's oppression, as well as masculine-macho values, to their farthest limits" ("Sexuality and Sexual Politics" 246). In her heartfelt plea against war and its destructive forces, Accad argues "that if sexuality and women's issues were dealt with from the beginning, wars might be avoided, and revolutionary struggles and movements for liberation would take a very different path" (Sexuality and War 27). In placing sexuality at the center of national liberation struggles, Accad does

not reject nationalism, but rather seeks to reconcile feminism and nationalism, which she redefines as "belief in and love of one's country" (13). Interestingly, in her introduction to Sexuality and War, she quotes Ghousoub's article mentioned above; yet she does not exclusively blame the religion of Islam for war and women's oppression (for Lebanon is "a country mosaic in ethnic [as well as religious] groups"); rather she finds fault in Islamo-Arab culture *per se*, and its promotion of Arab male machismo and violence.

In taking this position, Accad ignores not only the incongruity in power among the competing political parties or "factions" inside Lebanon's civil war, but also the incongruous violences committed by the intervention of outside forces, which she lumps together as all motivated by male machismo and violence. Significantly, she fails to mention Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and its decimation of over 20,000 mostly Palestinian civilians, with its purpose of destroying the PLO in southern Lebanon. Rather, she reads Israeli intervention in Lebanon as motivated by a desire to "prove that peaceful cohabitation among different religions is an impossibility and a myth" (34). Her strangely psychologized interpretation of Israeli motivation as part of the "Zionist myth" is grounded in Accad's concept of *Lebanism*, which means choosing to belong to a pluralistic culture based on the "the political notion of alterity, or acceptance of other's difference" (38).

Accad's concept of *Lebanism*, in some sense, mirrors Sandoval's differential consciousness, in that it argues for acceptance of a number of viewpoints and perspectives to be contained within one "space," be it the state of Lebanon, or the "imagined community" of third world women. Accad's means of reaching this state of mutual acceptance, however, relies

on her notion of a "gendered femaleness" that is antithetical to the workings of war, with its violence and destruction. In this sense, her argument mirrors that set forth by Robin Morgan in The Demon Lover: The Sexuality of Terrorism, who, in her attempt to theorize a global sisterhood based on a binary of genders, fails to trace the effects of the Western imperialism on third world women. Accad's analysis of war novels by both male and female Arab authors relies heavily on theories of nonviolence and Western feminism, among them Virginia Woolf's Three Guineas, which I have discussed in chapter two of this work. In reducing war to the gender struggle, and failing to recognize how militarism, masculinity, and misogyny are as prevalent in the West as in the Arab world (and have often been considerably more destructive),¹⁰ Accad ignores the fact that many men in Lebanon are also victims of oppressive structures, and perpetuates Orientalist attitudes of Arab culture as defective because Arab men are driven by violence and a will for sexual domination. Furthermore, her analysis is wanting in some grounding in the political/historical conditions of the Lebanese Civil War. Although this conflict is represented in the West as a religious war, in fact, the civil war grew out of class and ideological conflicts, wherein the lower class majority (Muslims and Christians) rejected political control by the wealthy ruling elite (Maronite Christians), who had the backing of the United States and Israel.

Because Accad ignores these factors, I am tempted to ask her who her audience is. Why does she critique Arab male machismo and their purported propensity to violence in the context of U.S. academia? Whose opinion is she trying to influence, or is she rather just reinforcing everything the U.S. already "knows" about the Arab world and has used to

justify its intervention in the Middle East? If her work is to be oppositional, must she not also maintain opposition within the context she writes, a double-edged consciousness that does not focus exclusively on the internal influences and "the responsibility of the civil population" of Lebanon (35), but also on the historical political involvement of the U.S. as well, particularly in its support of Israel, and then Syria, in its betrayal of Lebanon? These are questions that must be asked when we seek to build alliances with others of "oppositional consciousness."

In contrast to Accad and Ghousseb, Leila Ahmed, whose study, Women and Gender in Islam, I have used throughout this work, is very aware of the context in which she writes. Ahmed's early work, however, has been labeled "apologist,"¹¹ because she has often taken the exclusive position of defending Arab culture and Islamic practices to the West. For example, in "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem" (1982), Ahmed, an Egyptian, describes her dismay when attending a presentation at the National Women's Studies Association conference on "Women in Islam," where three Arab women panelist presented, what seemed to her, "an unwarrantably rosy picture of women in Islam" (521). But after two years of living in the United States, an environment of pervasive stereotypes and ignorance about the Arab world, she felt a similar compulsion to defend Arab culture (521). Given this hostile context, Ahmed argues that it is difficult for Arab feminists to be "freely critical" of their own societies, while admitting that such criticism is necessary to Arab feminism (527). She then goes on to correct Western misconceptions of the harem, overemphasizing the "positives" of a tradition that, I believe, would be better discarded. Ahmed, however, is very conscious of her anti-imperialist strategy here, which she foregrounds at the beginning of her

debate. What Ahmed defends is not exclusively the harem, but the homosocial ordering of Arab society, which, she argues, provides a social space for women--to share experiences, stories, and jokes about men--and excludes men. I read her defense of the harem, on one level, as a tactical attempt to claim a woman's space that subverts the dominant male order of the larger society. Like "insurgent ground" or unoccupied territory, this space allows the collective of women the freedom to dismantle male domination. However, the harem, contained or enclosed, as it were, within the master's house, offers minimal potential for transforming existing power structures. As Ahmed has written in her later work, the harem was often divided within because such social arrangements fostered women's emotional and psychological instability. Women were forced into competition in order to secure a position within this structure: while higher class women struggled for status, lower class women fought for economic security.¹²

In "Arab Culture and Writing Women's Bodies" (1989), Ahmed articulates "a tradition of active female eroticism," which she examines through medieval Islamic discussions on contraception and abortion (44).¹³ Her analysis of Arab women's sexuality is placed within the context of reproductive rights--a concern that has dominated U.S. feminism, but has not always been a primary concern among third world feminists. Again, Ahmed is very conscious of her western audience. She explains that contraception was permitted within all religious legislation of the medieval period, yet abortion was a contested issue within different schools of jurisprudence. Interestingly, those who opposed abortion, borrowed from Aristotle, a Western philosopher, to defend the primacy of the male seed in conception (49); while others advised that abortion or abortive

medicines be used when necessary. While these views of female sexuality were relatively permissive, Ahmed asserts that they still were developed within a perspective that enforced the dominance of male interest concerning women's bodies. In contrast, women's oral culture was very frank in the expressions of female sexuality, and some of this was translated in the works of the Hadiths. The medieval legislation and writings about women's bodies suggest that Arab conceptualizations of women's bodies have differed greatly from those in the West, and have also differed greatly from the limited Western conceptions of Arab women as passive, silent, and sexually repressed. Still Ahmed fails to address the discrepancy between medieval Islamic legislation and contemporary practice regarding women's reproductive rights in the Arab world.

In her most recent book, Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate (1992), Ahmed takes a double-edged and multi-directional approach in her criticism and interpretation of the political-historical effects of cultural, Islamic, and nationalist movements, as well as Western modes of domination, including Christianity, colonialism, capitalism, and feminism, on the lives of Arab women, from ancient Mesopotamia to the present. Her own mobility of strategies, exemplified in her ability to revise her earlier interpretations, allows her to negotiate the multiply oppressive structures that bind Arab women and often dictate the terms of their resistance. By exposing how these competing discourses have constructed Arab women's relationship to her culture as a symbolic one that serves various structures of power, Ahmed effectively writes Arab woman out of her symbolic role as the bearer of culture. The hint of apology in her earlier works disappears here, and her "differential

consciousness" negotiates the complex factors relevant to Arab women's experience.

Ahmed's historical analysis, grounded in a critique of the andocentrism and misogyny of both Western and Arab cultures, refutes the assumption that the liberation of Arab women depends on them casting off Arab culture or Islamic religion and embracing Western cultural practices. Rather, she asserts that Arab women "engage critically and constructively with their heritage on its own terms" (128), and her book offers such an engagement. For Ahmed, the discourse of the veil, which emerged in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries with the rise of colonialism and imperialism, represents the converging effects of "culture and class, and imperialism and nationalism [as they] became vitally entangled with the issue of woman."¹⁴

According to Ahmed, during the nineteenth-century, Western encroachment on the economic markets of the Middle East, the emergence of "modern" Arab states, and the domination of the region by European colonial powers brought significant social transformation to the region. The effects of these shifting political and economic factors were, in general "decidedly negative" for women; however, Ahmed posits that they set in motion the gradual dismantling of social institutions and mechanisms for the control and seclusion of women which had prohibited them from participating in much of the activities of their society (127). Under colonialism, women emerged as a central subject for national debate: secular nationalist proposed reforms in the status of women as a critical aspect of political, social, and cultural reforms necessary for advancement in order to compete with European societies (128). This "solution," however, bought into the dictates and attitudes of the colonial powers, and

those expressed by a number of travel writers, who, in their attempts to "save brown women" from their men and their culture called for Arab women to cast off the veil and embrace European culture. Ahmed, here, turns her attention specifically to Egypt to show how the discourse of the veil became charged with other issues, including debates over westernization vs. "authentic cultural values" (130). The move for the abolition of the veil, she argues, signified merely a "symbolic reform" rather than any significant advances for women (145), conferring on women a symbolic function in reforms for "advancement." Because the lower and lower middle classes did not benefit from Western economic and political presence, nor from the reforms proposed by the nationalist agenda, a competing Islamic discourse emerged, advocating a rejection of Western ways and a reclamation of indigenous cultural practices, including veiling, thereby widening the gap between the classes and between classes of women (148). Similar tensions emerged among Arab feminists, where upper and upper middle class women (sometimes Christians) tended to embrace the westernizing philosophy of the early nationalist movements, as well as the dictates of Western feminism; whereas subaltern women "searched for a way to articulate female subjectivity and affirmation within a native, Islamic discourse" (174).

Ahmed criticizes both Islamicist and nationalist approaches, which exercised male (or Western) control over women's advancement; and sees colonialism as the major contributor in binding Arab women between these competing discourses. In Egypt, particularly, the British imported their ideas about women in the form of what she calls "colonial feminism," based on the limited notion that Other men in Other, non-western societies oppress women (but we do not) (151). "Colonial feminism" was thus used

against Arab cultures to justify colonial intervention and to promote the so-called superiority of Western culture, all in the name of women. As a result, colonialist discourse on women's status and cultural practices, such as veiling, set the terms of the Arab resistance narrative of taking up the veil, thus grounding its resistance in the very discourse it rejects. Ahmed, pointing to the andocentrism and misogyny of both cultures; exposes *the political uses* of the idea that Islam oppresses women as another mode of western domination that is based on a misunderstanding of Muslim society. She asserts that while Western women have had the freedom to identify their own sites of struggle, this has not been the case with Muslim women whose resistance becomes entangled in a number of competing discourses and political agendas (166-67). Ahmed critiques the notion of returning to the "purity" of the past, and the Islamicist position that continues to "trap the issue of women within the struggle over culture" (236). Rather she advocates the right of Arab women to choose their own sites of struggle, as she urges us to look to other cultures with respect. In her formulation of an approach to feminist scholarship, she asserts that

In the context of the contemporary structure of global power, then, we need a feminism that is vigilantly self-critical and aware of its historical and political situatedness if we are to avoid becoming the unwitting collaborators in racist ideologies whose costs to humanity have been no less brutal than those of sexism. (247)

For Arab, or Arab American, feminists writing within the context of U.S. academia, then, it is important to maintain a strategy that is double-, if not multiply-edged. Considering the context in which we write, we need to formulate theories that address the multiple effects of racism, colonialism,

and imperialism on the lives of Arab women as well as the Orientalizing discourses that have justified imperialist practices. For to critique only Islam or gender relations within Arab society is to be complicit in the oppressive power relations of Western domination; whereas, to attack only imperialist and Orientalist attitudes toward Arab women is to serve tacitly as an apologist for Arab patriarchy. Within the context of U.S. academia, feminist theory grounded in a critique Islam or Arab culture, as Ahmed argues, "may fall to inadvertently serving the political ends of the Western political order and of Western-style male dominance" (246). And we must ask, then, is such a critique oppositional? Differential consciousness, as a strategy of resistance, must include an awareness of how various critiques may be appropriated by those in power within a given context. It allows us to recognize our collaboration with oppressive ideologies, and, when necessary, to transform our tactics.

Nationalism and Palestinian Women

While I have discussed Arab women's negotiations within and against specifically religious and cultural ideologies, nationalism has also been an important arena of struggle for Arab feminist. Despite their active involvement in nationalist movements, Middle Eastern women have been relegated to a symbolic function and their participation negated by regressive state policies regarding women after liberation. For example, in both Algeria and Iran, nationalism assumed to speak for the woman's question by defining women's return to tradition as a necessary sacrifice to the cause of the new "nation." However, in the context of third world decolonization movements, it is clear that Virginia Woolf's assertion, "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my

country is the whole world" (Three Guineas 109) comes from the mouth of a woman with a country to cast off, rather than from the mouth of a woman whose country is under occupation by foreign forces. In contrast to Woolf, Algerian feminist Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas defines nationalism as "the result of belonging to a country that has to prove its existence" (108). Within contemporary neocolonialist structures, this burden of proof often remains for third world countries even long after "liberation."

Today, the Palestinian people are struggling to prove their existence in the face of forty-five years of Zionist colonization of their homeland. Since Edward Said brought the Palestinian issue to the fore in The Question of Palestine (1979), other scholars within U.S. academia have also taken up the issue. For example, R. Rhadikrishnan writes,

The international community of nations continues to bear the shame and guilt of not yet acknowledging the Palestinian right to nationhood and self-determination. The Palestinians continue being submitted to and brutalized by the duplicitous international consensus (spearheaded largely by the United States) that refuses to listen to the Palestinians because they are not yet a nation and at the same time frustrates their every attempt to become a nation. ("Nationalism, Gender, and Narrative Identity" 83)

Radhakrishnan's argument reveals how their non-nation status serves as a mode of silencing, a refusal to recognize, the Palestinians. While nationalism has been a critical step for third world peoples struggling for recognition and self-determination, Said further defines the Palestinian independence movement as a "transnational" rather than a nationalist movement, because it is based on principles of justice and a claim to human

rights rather than to a specific identity ("Intellectuals and the War" 17). Within this model, then, equal right for women should also prevail; self-determination for Palestinian peoples should lead to the democratization of the "nation" as a whole, including equal rights for women. When applied to the woman question, Said's formulation of transnationalism iterates an ideal, a goal shared by many Palestinian women, but one, like Palestinian nationhood, that has yet to be realized.

In her article, "Women of the *intifada*," Nahlo Abdo distinguishes between two forms of nationalism: "the institutionalized, state form of nationalism and the nationalism of a liberation movement," which, she argues, provides a "space for women's emancipation" (22). Abdo admits that Palestinian women have served as national icons in the struggle, particularly in their role as *Um al-shaheed* or "mother of the martyr," whose role has often been to bear more children as hands for the cause. However, she argues, such critiques of Arab patriarchy must also investigate the ways in which the Israeli nation, through "The Voice of Israel," has consistently encouraged Jewish women to increase their birthrate, on the assumption that their race is superior and should not be overrun by inferior Palestinians (23). Abdo adds that although "mother of the martyr" was the highest honor granted Palestinian women in the first years of the *intifada*, the women's work committees, which operate at the grass roots level throughout the territories, have successfully transferred this symbolic honor from "the mother" and her confining role, to the "women of emancipation," to include women martyrs, prisoners, and mothers of female detainees.

The *intifada* has, in many ways, placed Palestinian women and men on similar ground, as victims of occupation and as active participants in

the nationalist struggle. Yet, women also experience the devastating effects of occupation in very gender specific ways. Israeli soldiers' frequent use of tear gas, beatings, and imprisonment has radically increased the numbers of miscarriages among Palestinian women. Hundreds of women have been imprisoned, some have been raped by Israeli soldiers to force them to collaborate. Exploiting the strong value within Arab culture placed on women's honor, Israeli soldiers have taken pictures of women whom they have drugged and sexually assaulted, and then threatened to send pictures to family or to pass them around the towns or villages, unless the women cooperate with them. This Israeli tactic led Palestinian women to adopt the slogan *al-ard qabla al-'ard*, "Land before honor," reversing the traditional popular slogan "Honor before land." (Haj 771). Honor was redefined as participation in the nationalist struggle, rather than as virginity, thereby subverting simultaneously the repressive tactics of the occupation and traditional patriarchal relations within their society.¹⁵ As Palestinian women work towards a feminist conception of nationalism both in alliance with nationalist factions and within their own women's organizations, their movement "offers a direction for a more diversified feminist theory and for feminist movements that incorporate the experiences of all women" (Haj 778).

The following chapter includes interviews with Palestinian women from my 1991 trip to the occupied territories. I believe it is appropriate to end this study with the voices of Palestinian women who are engaged on the front lines of anti-colonial struggle. Their stories speak to how their liberation as women is linked to the liberation of the Palestinian nation, how we in the U.S. collaborate in their oppression, and how our mutual liberation depends on the collective project of decolonization.¹⁶

Notes to Chapter 9: Third World as Insurgent Ground

¹In the decade since that conference, Western feminism has taken a closer look at its own privileged position in approaching issues of difference, in an attempt to understand what Teresa DeLauretis terms, "the differences between and among women," including race, class, and sexual difference. See Feminist Studies, Critical Studies, 14. Another excellent source for this discussion is Elizabeth Spelman, Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

²For an insightful critique of Robin Morgan's theories of "global sisterhood," and its privileging of Western women's experience, see Chandra Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters: Locating The Politics of Experience," Copyright 1 (Fall 1987).

³Among these books, the following are a few that make significant contributions to an understanding of Arab women's lives: Lila Abu-Lughod's Veiled Sentiments (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1986) and Writing Women's Worlds (1993); Bouthaina Shaaban's Both Right and Left Handed (London: The Women's Press, 1988); and Orayb Aref Najjar's Portraits of Palestinian Women (Salt Lake City: U of Utah Press, 1992).

⁴As I have argued about Arab American women in chapter 6 of this work, because their identity is so ill-defined and submerged within U.S. culture, they have more readily formed alliances with other marginalized groups in their struggles for liberation.

⁵Here I am paraphrasing Nawal El Saadawi's discussion of the term "feminism" in The Progressive Interview. For a variety of Arab feminist arguments that have been translated into English, see Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writings, eds. Miriam Cooke and Margot Badran.

⁶Regarding the use of the term "feminism," I think Rita Giacaman's explanation clearly shows how the term has its limits within Arab feminism: ". . . we are against the use of the word 'feminist', precisely because of the western connotations it harbours. Look we are trying to build a movement which all Palestinian women feel is habitable . . . If we are going to frighten off a single woman because of a word, then it is better to ditch the word. So instead of calling our programme a feminist agenda, we'll call it an agenda for women . . . It is how we agree and define the agenda that is important, no which label we pin to it" (3). See her interview in Race and Class.

⁷A recent exception to this anti-Islamic bias in the West is the case of the Bosnian Muslims, who have received sympathetic treatment in the U.S. media as victims of Serbian "ethnic cleansing." I would attribute U.S. media selectivity in the Bosnian case to two factors. First, the Bosnians are Eastern European (white) and not Arab. It is notable that the U.S. press consistently uses the term "Bosnian Muslims;" whereas, in the case of Arabs, the term "Islamic fundamentalists" is the norm. The fact that the

U.S. press does not acknowledge the majority of Muslim moderates in Arab countries, but focuses exclusively on what it terms "fundamentalism," attests to the racism in anti-Islamic bias against Arab peoples. Second, the U.S. government is not directly involved in oppressing the Bosnians, as it is in the case of the Arabs, whom they must consistently portray as "other" to justify their methods of domination.

⁸Ghoussoub's interpretation of Islam is contradicted by Islamic feminists, such as Fatima Mernissi, who see Islam as a movement to break down the divisions of tribal systems, in favor of a unified vision for marginalized peoples across cultural boundaries. See The Veil and the Male Elite, 26-27.

⁹In her interview in Race and Class, Nawal El Saadawi, the foremost advocate for women's sexual freedom in Egypt, if not in the Arab world, tells of how she was living and working in Beirut, with bombs flying all around, a context in which, she argues Arab women cannot "worry about the nature of our orgasms" (177).

¹⁰See, for example, Susan Jeffords' discussion of U.S. militarism and the Vietnam War in The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War.

¹¹See, for example, Mai Ghoussoub, "Feminism--or the Eternal Masculine--in the Arab World," 18. Ghoussoub describes Ahmed's defense of the harem as "the worst mythomania of the Arab consensus," and attributes her argument to "misconceived national pride."

¹²Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam, 84. One intention of Ahmed's earlier article seems to be to dispel the Western fantasy of the harem as a site of male access to multiple women and a den of sensual pleasures. Lila Abu-Lughod's comments on polygamy are also enlightening here for she argues that polygyny (polygamy) is an oppressive institution to women "in that it causes them pain, but it is not necessarily the pleasure for husbands that Western fantasies about harems suggest." Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories (University of California Press, 1993) 19.

¹³For an insightful discussion of this "tradition of active female eroticism" within Arab literature by both men and women, see Fedwa Malti-Douglas, Woman's Body, Woman's Words.

¹⁴In the first two sections of her book, Ahmed chronicles the history of women in the Middle East from ancient Mesopotamia to the nineteenth century, addressing the complex issue of the veil as a key cultural signifier of women's roles within society. In pre-Islamic Assyria, for example, laws existed prescribing veiling for "respectable" women, and forbidding veiling among slaves and prostitutes; thus the veil served to differentiate which women were sexually available, and reinforced the class divisions between women (15). In pre-Islamic Egyptian society, in contrast, women held equality with men and were neither veiled nor secluded (31), but Egyptian women lost right under the Greek conquest of 333 B.C. Veiling, a

practice common among the Greeks Romans, Jews and Assyrians, was hardly introduced by Islam, rather the Qu'ran includes only one verse dealing with women's clothing, which instructs them "to guard their private parts and throw a scarf over their bosoms" (55). According to Ahmed, Muhammed instituted veiling for his wives to protect them from the "thronging community on their doorstep." In these early days of Islam, rebellions against Islamic restrictions of women were fought by Jahelia women and priestesses, whose freedom to participate in religion and warfare, was banned under the new religion. According to Ahmed this conflict signifies the tension that existed and grew between "the ethical vision of Islam" which was "stubbornly egalitarian, including with respect to the sexes" and the hierarchical structure of gender relations, particularly within marriage, instituted by Islam (63-64).

¹⁵In an interview in Ms., Hanan Ashrawi explains how women's political work has changed the definitions of shame and honor within Palestinian society. According to Ashrawi, Women imprisoned before the *intifada* were considered "damaged goods" and not marriageable, but with the *intifada*, released women prisoners became desirable, because their struggle made them honorable, and virginity was no longer a question. See Rabab Hadi, "Ms Exclusive: The Feminist Behind the Spokeswoman--A Candid Talk with Hanan Ashrawi," Ms. (March/April 1992): 14-17.

¹⁶The Palestinian Declaration of Independence (Algiers, 1988) calls for an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, alongside the state of Israel.

Chapter 10: Travels in Occupied Territory:
Interviews with Palestinian Women

I believe we can only realise a truly independent agenda for Palestinian women if we set about forging alliances and coalitions with these other oppressed groups, around the issues of democracy and equality. Because then we will have laid bases of mutual trust, understanding and support. And we need their support.

--Rita Giacaman, interview¹

Traveling into East Jerusalem from Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, you have to change from an Israeli to an Arab taxi before crossing what is known as the green line. The Israeli driver drops off the other passengers in West Jerusalem, a town glowing with lights, pulsing with music and night life, the smells of food, the sounds of voices, before directing me and my partner to an Arab taxi. Driving up the long, sinewy road to the Mount of Olives in a hushed deadness, the driver exclaims, "The *intifada* is dead, and this city has died along with it!" The only other sound echoes from the graffiti scrawled across the doors of every closed shop, on every wall, and the sides of buildings, painted in black, green, and red letters, as I run them through my mind, translating words in my broken Arabic: *ta'aish al-intifada, falisteen*, long live the *intifada*; Palestine. Here, in the occupied territories where to write graffiti is punishable by death, the weight of these words clings to the silence of night. Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish writes, "We travel like other people, but we return to nowhere . . . We have a country of words. Speak speak so we may know the end of this travel."² This time, I am the traveler in a land of landless people, a country of words.

Palestine. To say the word alone is to set up a debate of history where contests are played out over maps. Palestinian women have a long history of involvement in the struggle for their homeland. As early as 1929 when

Palestine was under British rule, 200 Palestinian women organized to protest British occupation and the threat of Zionist colonization of their country. Their pleas, however, were ignored, and in 1948, in the wake of the holocaust, before the U.N. partition plan could be negotiated, the British withdrew, and Palestine was taken by Zionist Jews.³ Over 700,000 Palestinians were driven into refugee camps in neighboring Arab countries, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank. After the six-day war of June, 1967 the remainder of the territory, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, fell under Israeli occupation, creating another 300,000 refugees.

Before 1948, the name Palestine marked a land bordered by the Mediterranean Ocean to the west, the Jordan River to the east, Egypt's Sinai desert to the south, and the mountains of Lebanon and Syria to the north, but the country has effectively been erased from the map. To deny this erasure, many Palestinian women wear the map around their necks on a gold chain, a carved sliver of land, engraved with the name *falisteen* or Palestine. Today, this land is commonly known as Israel, but every place here operates under two names and two time zones. The Palestinians say "al-Khalil," not "Hebron." They set their watches by Palestinian, not Israeli time, as if to say, we reject your colonization of our space, our land, our time and our history.

In August of 1991, I traveled with friends to the occupied territories to interview Palestinian women about the conditions of life under Israeli occupation. In the wake of the Gulf War, and with the limited promise of a Middle East Peace conference, the new world looked so much like the old world order, particularly to the Palestinians. The *intifada*, their national uprising for independence, which began in December, 1987, was then in its fourth year, but economic depression from the Gulf War because of

extended curfews, failed crops, lost jobs inside Israel, and lost influx of money from relatives who had been working in Kuwait, had significantly deflated the resistance, as well as the spirits of the Palestinians.

Despite these setbacks, the Palestinian women I met with remained committed to their struggle, challenging, in both word and deed, masculinist conceptions of nationalism, as they work towards an independent state. These women, from cities and refugee camps, working women and intellectuals, from the various classes of Palestinian society, represent a sampling of the differing approaches to women's liberation within the context of nationalist struggle.⁴ Their stories speak their struggle for individual and collective identities, as women and as Palestinians.

My second day in East Jerusalem, I was standing on the veranda of our flat on the Mount of Olives with the mother of the house, Mona.⁵ Two young women were hanging up laundry nextdoor, and she gestured toward them, saying, "Today their brother will be released from jail after one year. He was arrested for writing graffiti. He is fifteen years old."⁶ Mona pointed to a woman across the road walking up the path with her toddler, "This woman was imprisoned for six months and badly tortured. In that house, their son, 16, is in jail for life. They accused him of trying to kill an Israeli soldier in Jerusalem. And downstairs, is my cousin with six children. Her husband has been in jail for six years." In the courtyard below, a group of small children had just cornered a flock of ducks were chasing them around. As the ducks scattered, the children ran after them, climbing onto the rooftops. "Look at all these kids," Mona said, "they need a

father." Each house in this neighborhood told its own story of Israeli repression as a daily part of Palestinian experience.

That evening, Mona's daughter, Marie, offered to walk with me up to the hotel to make a phone call. Her brother, Raja, 7, the youngest and only son, began to cry because he wanted to go with us. Marie said that Raja is spoiled and always gets his way, "If he wants something from the moon, we would go and bring it to him." But his mother insisted that he couldn't go, because it was getting dark and we had to walk quickly. It is not safe to be out after dark with the soldiers, she said. "This place is dangerous because of the soldiers, not the Jews," she said. "We know the difference between governments and people. We have many Jewish friends. One family called us everyday during the Gulf War to see if we were okay. But you must be careful because of the soldiers."

Marie, 18, is preparing for her *tawjihi* (her high school graduation exams), but she is behind in her studies because of Israeli school closures during the uprising. "We must be realistic," she said, "We cannot have dreams." Marie confessed her dream to me--she would like to work for the United Nations, and she speaks both English and German. But she must score 98% on her *tawjihi* to get into Hebrew University, because admissions standards are much higher for Palestinians.

We left the hotel, and walked down the road to a park on the Mount of Olives that looks out over the old walled city of Jerusalem. Israeli soldiers circled the street in jeeps, then drove on. In the orange light of sunset, the golden Dome of the Rock shimmered against the fading city lights. A car drove up and one of Marie's school friends, wearing traditional Islamic dress, got out with her fiancé. We exchanged greetings, and after they departed, Marie said she does not want to marry until she finishes

university. I told her that I was surprised to see so many women in *hijab* and *jilbab*.⁷ "This, is because of the (Gulf) war. Everyone thinks they are going to die, and so they turn to God. Our life has gotten worse. We have no money, and the Israelis blame us for this war so they make us pay \$200 for each car and they call it a SCUD tax. They say we will pay for the missile damage. The girls get married younger because there is nothing for us here. But we must stay and keep on fighting, even if there is no hope."

Hanan Ashrawi

Recently, as official spokesperson for the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace Conference, Hanan Ashrawi, has become the most visible figure among Palestinian women, who have long struggled against their invisibility both within global politics and within their own societies. In a 1989 interview, she described her experience with the constant threat of death under occupation. "As Dean of Arts on the old campus [of Birzeit University] , I had to see four of my students die before my eyes, shot by Israeli soldiers, on campus. I had to cradle the head of a dying student. And this was even before the beginning of the *intifada*. I've seen scores of students shot and injured. I had to transport them in my own car through checkpoints to hospitals. My children had to see the blood in the seats of the car and witness and feel the trauma of the killing of innocent Palestinians throughout their childhood. This kind of treatment of educational institutions and of human beings, of individuals, is something that's beyond description, it's beyond words."⁸

Ashrawi, however, is rarely at a loss for words. Her eloquent, non-nonsense political style defies U.S. stereotypes of oppressed, veiled Arab women; yet she is hardly an aberration within Palestinian society. After

the Madrid conference, People magazine characterized her as a "political diva," an anomaly among Arabs and Arab women alike. Ignoring the fact that the Palestinian movement is a secular resistance, People described her as "an unlikely representative for a predominately Muslim cause with male chauvinist leaders."⁹ Since Ashrawi has gained media attention in the U.S., much stress is laid on the fact that she is Christian, not Muslim, that she is U.S. educated, painting Ashrawi as one of "us" rather than one of "them." In fact, the media seems to want to claim her as one of "our" own, even though she has been one of the most outspoken advocates of Palestinian nationalism and independence.

During August of 1991, Ashrawi was in Geneva, preparing for the upcoming peace conference. I did not have the chance to meet her, but my partner shared with me this videotaped interview he conducted in 1989 in her home in Ramallah.¹⁰ Among other issues, Ashrawi discussed women's participation in the nationalist struggle and their revisioning of gendered conceptions of nationalism.

"We as women involved in statemaking are also involved in shaping our own destiny, in articulating our own gender agenda. We have managed--through our own work and by actually proving ourselves on the ground, not by sitting back and demanding rights, but by actually working,--to attack the stronghold of male domination, the political and economic spheres. Because we do not have established traditional structures and systems, because we are evolving our own, because we are building our own infrastructure, women have been involved from the beginning, from the base up. We have started by taking part in popular work and grassroots organizations through the establishment of the women's committees. And the women's committees are certainly the

appropriate grassroots organizations to deal with Palestinian reality, by creating economic alternatives and appropriate structures, whether economic or educational. We started with day care centers, with the creation of cooperatives and alternative home industries. But, at the same time we are engaged in articulating a feminist perspective and creating the gender agenda itself as policy, not as either a mere concession, nor as a form of lipservice or tokenism.

"You find women involved at all levels of political decision-making in the underground movement and in all the different activities of the *intifada*. There are women who are concentrating their efforts on the legal system of our future state where the statement of gender equality in our declaration of independence will find substance. It says that there is equality between men and women, work equality, opportunities, and even linguistic equality, because we do not want to either have a semblance of a non-discriminatory system, or to be relegated to a supporting system. So we want to have the discourse itself as well as the substance, together.

"It seems to me that its an extremely challenging and exciting time for us, as opposed to the Israeli women. We have met with many Israeli women and with our contacts in the Israeli feminist movement, and we've discovered that their struggle is even more difficult than ours. I mean, we as a nation are struggling for self-determination. And as women, of course, we struggle for self-determination. But the Israelis have to struggle within an already established system that is highly militaristic, that is extremely male-dominated, that is based on a macho ideal of the soldier as being the hero of society, while our society has a totally different view of honor and heroism. It doesn't have to do with muscles and macho behavior, but much

more so with deliberate, systematic, and positive attitudes having to deal with the building of a nation.

"So although as women we have many problems in common, we also have differences. One thing we all agree upon is that oppression cannot be fragmented, and the struggle against oppression has to be carried out holistically. If you are part of the Israeli system, you cannot struggle to be free as a woman if you accept and condone the subjugation of a nation, because it is the same mentality, the same ideology that is responsible for national subjugation, for class subjugation, as well as for gender discrimination. So together we have to tackle this whole ideology which is prevalent in Israel and which has led to the subjugation of women, the discrimination of race and class, as well as the national oppression of the Palestinians as a whole.

"Now it is very clear that Palestinian women are very visible in the *intifada*. We are not merely reacting to an immediate and visible threat. We are deliberately taking part in a longterm process and we are achieving gains which we are ingraining, solidifying, in order to build on for the future. We are not reacting spontaneously (in some cases maybe we are), but at the same time we are creating a reality, shattering norms and taboos of our traditional society, and building different perspectives and different approaches to the new Palestinian state. Because for us, freedom, again, cannot be fragmented. A nation cannot be free if its women are subjugated. A nation cannot be free if its children are subjugated. A nation cannot be free if it practices class oppression, or racial or religious discrimination. So by formulating the theory, the ideology of the women's struggle in Palestine, I feel that we are trying to guarantee the longterm

accomplishments of Palestinian women and not just short term gains, by making them a way of life."

After the first round of peace talks in Madrid, October 1991, the Palestinian people gathered at the Allenby Bridge (which connects the West Bank to Jordan) to welcome home their leaders--Hanan Ashrawi and the delegates to the peace conference. The people came to the bridge with optimism, with hope that the peace process would produce results, that it would transform words into land. They came carrying olive branches and offered them to Israeli soldiers. A friend of mine who was there at the time, an American Jew, said that the hope was exhilarating, but quickly suppressed when some of the soldiers began firing at the Palestinian crowd, even as they leaned toward them with their olive branches. (a fact that the U.S. news failed to report). By the seventh round of the peace talks, in October 1992, a sense of despair had hit both the Palestinians and their leaders. As Hanan Ashrawi said, "Because of the conditions on the ground and because of the deterioration in human rights conditions, there is increasing skepticism by the Palestinians pertaining to the peace process and its efficacy, its ability to change conditions."¹¹

The Women's Work Committees

The combination of increased Israeli repression and the rise in Islamic fundamentalism¹² has contributed to a backlash against women's progress made in the first years of the uprising. Yet Palestinian women's participation in the nationalist movement remains widespread, with over 10,000 women working directly in the women's work committees described by Hanan Ashrawi. These grass-roots women's organizations call for the "right of self-determination" as women as well as the right of self-

determination as a people. Established in 1978 in the villages, refugee camps, and cities of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to address women's needs under occupation, the committees, are allied with the four major political factions within the territories.¹³ Although operating under the agenda of particular male-dominated factions often creates obstacles for Palestinian women, Rita Giacaman asserts that the alliance between these factions and the women's movement is a "necessary contradiction." Like many women, she sees the success of the women's movement as linked with the democratization of the Palestinian movement as a whole: "The greater the democratisation of the political factions, the more space women will have to pursue the two roles--as supporters of their factions, on the one hand, while being independently loyal to the cause of women, on the other" (35).

We met with some members of a women's committee in Ramallah in a classroom of a local nursery school. Because it is illegal for Palestinians to gather for political purposes, the women's committees generally operate out of kindergartens or nursery schools within the community. The committees thereby provide families with much needed day care, even as the school operates as a ground for recruiting new members; yet its membership also includes many single women and women without children.

Rema introduced us to two other members, Hannah and Samiya, who sat in a room decorated with Arabic letters and brightly colored cut-out flowers. Together, and with the help of Rema's translation, they explained the different attitudes of Palestinian women towards gender and nationalist issues.

"In the Palestinian women's movement we have three groups:

The first group doesn't think that women are under social oppression and it's only national oppression that we are facing. These are mainly the older generation of women involved in charitable organizations and other activities, as well as some part of the political movement who think only the national question is important. Then there are other people who think that it's social and national together, and this is mainly the leftists and the three other women's committees. Yet due to the situation of the occupation, all our activities and programs are mainly directed towards national issues, especially in the realm of the national struggle of the *intifada*, and we have forgotten about the social question. So now we are trying to address social issues as part of the national struggle. And the other group in the women's movement as a whole is the people who think that it's only a social question: 'Okay, national, but that doesn't mean a lot. It's not our work, it's the work of men, and war is the work of men and peace is the work of women.' These people represent a small part of the women's movement, including some academics. So these are the three points of view on the women's movement as a whole.

"Because everyone was participating in the *intifada*, our group grew to 500 members. So we divided our work into neighborhood committees, which were called for by the national leadership, to take part in teaching kids, providing medical care, etc. But as the *intifada* has passed through various stages, so has our work. After the Gulf War, people were depressed and felt that if rockets didn't change things, would stones work? There were no demonstrations or sit-ins. With increased economic pressures, we had to change our approach. We had to consider other forms of production to involve people in work who were dismissed from jobs inside the green line. We also have to confront the rise in Islamic

fundamentalism in the street, the pressure placed on women to wear *al-hijab* by the Islamic groups. Both the occupation forces and the fundamentalists are trying to make women stop their political activity, to force women back into the kitchen.

"We have learned from the Algerian women that we should not postpone our liberation until after national liberation. So we have begun to attack the social question as well, but not in a fanatic way so that we forget about the national struggle--no, both are linked. When we talk about the social questions, we cannot forget the conditions of occupation, or the mentality of our society, and we can't just adopt the philosophies of Western women and apply them here. For example, we had a conference on domestic violence, and one solution to the problem was to establish a women's shelter. But in our country, you cannot have a shelter because of the extended family which prevails here. If you had a shelter, you would find the whole extended family coming there to reclaim the woman.

"We have two types of men in our society. The first is the reactionary man who thinks he owns woman whoever she is--his mother, his sister, his wife. And the other type is the progressive man within the leftist movements. They are small in number and they believe that women should be liberated, that woman is equal to man, but in reality, they don't put the effort into changing the inequalities. Through this, we have learned that women's rights will not be given, but they must be taken, by force even, but they should be taken."

When we asked the women about their personal histories of political struggle, Samiya said, "I grew up in a house that always spoke about Palestine. When I was 3-years-old, my father was released from Jordanian prison. I was imprisoned when I was 14-years-old for one week. Then I

married a man who was released from prison, and we never forget that we have a big goal in front of us. So we have spent our life dreaming of Palestine and doing as much as we can for Palestine. We raise our children loving Palestine."

Samiya's older sister, Hannah, told this story.

"I began my political struggle in 1956 when a woman in my school was killed for burning the American flag, and I went out in the street and began to shout with the people against America. After that, in 1963, there was a big demonstration demanding that the Jordanian government join the union of Arab nations with Iraq, Syria and Egypt. The Jordanian soldiers killed many students, and they closed the schools and imposed a forty day curfew, and then they only let us come to school to take exams. I remember thinking that the Jordanian soldiers, because they were Arabs, didn't kill. So when one of the soldiers approached me and told me to go home, I said, 'I'm not going home.' He said, 'Then I'll shoot you.' And I said, 'Okay, I'll go home.' That was the first time they arrested me, and I had to go to the police and promise not to be involved in any more demonstrations. I was fourteen at the time, and my father refused to send me to the police. But when I went to school with my sister, they arrested me because the national movement had discovered me in school.

"When they arrested me, they said they would hold me for two days, but then they released me on the condition that I come to the police station everyday. That day, my father followed me to the station and asked the police about me. When I left the station, I saw my father, an old man but still very strong, standing in the street. I followed him, until he turned and looked at me. He said, 'Why are you coming home?'

'They released me and told me to return tomorrow.'

'But they said you have to stay 48 hours.'

'They released me. I don't know why, but they let me go.'

'Look,' he said, 'You chose this life. You didn't ask me, but I'll tell you only one thing. If I ever hear that you have mentioned any name, the name of anyone in the community, while you're in this building, you'll not be my daughter. I will deny you as my daughter.'

"And every time I've been under interrogation, I remember the words of my father (and I refuse to cooperate with them).

"In 1966, the Israeli soldiers entered a town near al-Khalil (Hebron), and we began to demonstrate. During the war of 1967, I was a member of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and from 1969 to '73 I was imprisoned for four years. Because it was the beginning of the occupation and the Israeli officials wanted to put down our resistance, they treated us very badly. They beat me, they pulled my hair, they burned cigarettes into my skin. But the worst thing of all, they put me in jail with twelve Israeli prostitutes, and I had never even heard of prostitution, I didn't know what a prostitute was.

The prostitutes asked me, 'Are you Fatah¹⁴?'

'No,' I said.

'We know you are Fatah, and we're going to kill you.'

"I was so afraid. I had to sleep with them in the same cell, but I couldn't sleep. I didn't eat anything for thirteen days, to get them to transfer me. After thirteen days, they took me to the military governor in Ramallah and brought me to a room with a table full of food. There all the officers who had touched me and tortured me asked me to sit with them and eat. It was the first time in my life that I put water in my mouth and I

couldn't swallow it. I couldn't eat or drink in front of the military government.

Finally, they moved me to Muscovia¹⁵ for two years. They transferred me to another cell, a big room with 23 beds. I was alone there and it was dark, and the beds were covered with blood. The next day, a big man came in with the soldiers who said, "This is the man who burned your god." I didn't know what they meant, but I guessed that this man must have been involved in starting the fire a couple weeks before in Al-Aqsa Mosque . . .

Here, unfortunately, our tape was erased. But I remember Hannah told us about her interrogation and torture by this man who had, as the soldiers said, "burned her god." When she appeared a week later for her trial in military court, she was badly beaten and bruised. Her father, whom she had not been allowed to see for two years, had come to court to see his daughter. When he looked at Hannah across the courtroom, saw her bruised face and broken body, he fell to the floor from a heart attack and died.

In broken phrases, Hannah went on with her story.

"In 1975, I was arrested again. Then I was released in the middle of June '75, and I haven't been arrested since. This is my political experience. But I think if I am speaking about cigarettes or food or anything, it's political. Everything in our life is political and connects us with each other.

"You know, we are human. We love people, we don't hate. We love life, we love everything, we love nature. But the Israeli soldiers and authorities have pushed us to hate them. It's very bad to hate, it means that you are losing your humanity. But when you see your children arrested

and beaten in front of you for nothing . . . I'm living near a mountain, and every night they bring kids, 13 or 14-years-old, to this mountain and they beat them. You can't imagine that these soldiers are human. So you see they are pushing us to hate, and we don't want to hate. If I am really a revolutionary, I can't hate.

"But this has been our land for thousands of years, and we want our rights. I can show you where my great, great, great grandfather is buried. We are asking people in the U.S. to hear what is our problem and what is our cause."

The Gaza Strip

As we drove past the military check points into Gaza City a couple days later, I thought of a saying by Ghassan Kanafani that Hannah had told us: "We must be revolutionary, because we have nothing to lose but our chains and our tents." This saying rang true particularly for the refugees, crowded into densely populated camps along the Gaza Strip. It was here that the uprising began on December 9, 1987, and here where the poverty and persistent death of the occupation has hit hardest.

In Shati refugee camp, grey tents and shacks of plaster and corrugated steel line the sandy shores of the Mediterranean. The cement walls of these buildings are pasted with fresh white paint, where Palestinian *chabab*¹⁶, at gunpoint, have been forced to paint over the graffiti of the night before. Goats roam the street, nosing through the garbage. A small girl in a pink dress stands barefoot, drawing figures with a stick in the sand, surrounded by broken plaster, old tires, broken down cars. A group of children in blue and white school uniforms jump over the sewage draining into the street. The call to prayer hums in the salt air.

We met Um Walid in her home in Shati refugee camp. She sat in a wicker chair, her son beside her. Behind her on the wall hung a print I had seen several times during my stay in Palestine, a picture of a Palestinian peasant, bent over in the tall grass, with a massive weight on his shoulders. Within the sphere of this weight was Palestine, at the center, the old city of Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock. The peasant, like the refugee, bears the heaviest burden of being a nationless people.

Um Walid, however, seemed to defy the weight of her circumstances. Like the older women in Gaza, she wore the *hijab*, a long white scarf with black embroidery around the edges, over her head and shoulders and tied under her chin, and a long turquoise dress with long sleeves known as *jilbab*. Her eyes were sharp, her face intense, her presence commanding.

"I have been in the women's committee for six years. We began our work to help the families of women in need. Our activities include visiting prisoners' families, distributing food, and doing embroidery to raise money. We have kindergartens for the children where we teach them the national songs and how to write and read. We also have cooperatives, for instance, we buy tomatoes when it's cheap, milk to make cheese, and we sell them in our shops. We are also making orange juice, grape juice and lemonade. During the holidays, we help students who are weak in certain subjects. All these activities have the support of the the national leadership which has called for popular education and the support of families.

"I was the first woman who was arrested in Gaza, along with four other women, for six months of administrative detention.¹⁷ While I was in prison, my husband was beaten in our home, and my son was arrested. I have another son who has been arrested six times during the *intifada*. He was shot in prison when the administration tried to suppress a prisoners'

demonstration where they were demanding improved food. The military officer shot him in the head. (Um Walid stands and shows us a plastic bullet that she keeps in a bowl on the shelf). They removed the bullet, and three days later in court, I saw him, very weak from this wound in his forehead, which was swollen. The administrator who shot him was beaten; I don't know why, but maybe there is justice.

"In 1988, I was arrested from my house. They took me to the government department and placed me in solitary confinement. After two weeks, we went on strike. We refused to go out on the break. Then they put us in a cell with Israeli criminals, drug addicts, etc. We were accused of being a members of the Palestine Liberation Organization, of distributing food to families, of leading a march in Gaza City, and sewing and distributing Palestinian flags. I didn't confess to any of these charges.

"My family lived in Jaffa and fled to Gaza in 1948. I was born in Gaza, and have lived all my life in Shati camp (Beach camp). Life here is difficult. Just twenty days ago there was a massacre by a special unit of Israeli soldiers. They opened fire on three masked *chabab*--one was killed immediately and the other two seriously wounded. Over thirty casualties were reported. The two other *chabab* died later."

Um Walid stands up to show us the photos of the martyrs, three young men. Like their mother, she keeps the men's pictures in the glass door of a cabinet. Her own family's pictures are hung on the wall, and she points to them as she speaks.

"My father and brother were martyred in the struggle. My brother was killed by the Israelis when they raided the house where he was hiding in 1970. My father was killed by Israelis four months after my brother, just passing in the street during some clashes.

"Because conditions have gotten so bad here, our final resort is armed struggle. We as Palestinians number 6 million, yet why don't we have a state? Why don't we have the right to live in an independent state? Because the U.S. always vetoes any U.N. resolution in favor of the Palestinian people, we do not have a Palestinian state. Armed struggle is the only way to regain our land."

Breaking up Palestinian Families

Family suffering, enforced separation, and death is a common experience for activist women in all classes of Palestinian society. The December 1992 expulsions of 415 Palestinian men--laborers, students, doctors, professors,--sent into no-man's land in the deserts between Israel and Lebanon without being charged with any crime provides another example of Israel's consistent and flagrant violation of human rights and international law.¹⁸ Although this is the largest such deportation in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, expulsion has been a regular part of Israeli policy deployed to rid the territories of activists who protest the occupation and to break up Palestinian families. In a 1989 interview, in the town of Beit Hanina, near Jerusalem, Zahira explained the experience of her husband's deportation and her own imprisonment.¹⁹

"Now after one year since the order of the deportation of my husband, they deported him, finally, after a very strong and continuous campaign through the committee of families of deportees that we *women* have established to defend our human rights. I was in prison when I heard that my husband had received his order of deportation. It was my four-year-old daughter who told me that my husband, her father, was

going to be deported. I cried during the visit, but while crying I remained strong.

"I was arrested twice. At the beginning of the *intifada* for one week, and then in April '88, I was arrested together with my husband and my sister-in-law. For five days I had to be in this coffin which is a meter by a meter, without a mattress, without food, without water, without electricity, small holes in the ceiling of the solitary confinement cell. I heard the sound of the shouting and screaming of prisoners under torture and the sound of the interrogators and the guards who are shouting and insulting the prisoners. In this situation, I had to continue fighting. I had to remind them always of my rights and to demand it with all the means I have."

"Our story here is similar to any story all over the world, all the revolutions--Vietnam, Cambodia, South Africa, Algeria, Nicaragua, in all places, all the people who are fighting for their freedom and all the people who got their freedom and liberation."

When we called Zahira to meet with her again in August, 1991, her sister told us that she had recently left, with her daughter, for Jordan to join her husband in exile.

Women's Affairs

Women's Affairs is a resource and training center in Nablus, in the northern mountainous region of the West Bank. Like similar organizations established in Jerusalem and Gaza, these centers are "the product of a collective consciousness, a certain realisation within the Palestinian movement that something must be done to upgrade the level of political strength women have--to develop skills of independent thought and analysis that are necessary to intervene effectively in public life"

(Giacaman 32). In order to train women leaders both for the nationalist struggle and for the independent state, Women's Affairs operates independently of the factions, and from a very strong "Palestinian feminist, not western feminist," ideology. Rita Giacaman, a Palestinian scholar and organizer of this independent movement says, "Of course, we study western feminism, Third World feminism, etc., but we are in the process of forming our own feminism suited to our own conditions, having been informed by these other feminisms" (35). The centers work specifically with women activists who come from the committees, because the women's work committees comprise a large part of Palestinian society. In order to begin to affect social policy, the organizers, mainly independent scholars and intellectuals, decided that they needed to begin by collecting data on women's issues, which have not been previously documented.

Sahar Khalifeh, Palestinian novelist, directs the Nablus Women's Affairs, and interacts with her trainees as both mentor and mother. In a room with a few computer terminals, and tables and chairs arranged in circles for seminars, we met with Sahar and ten young women at various stages of research and training. Two women explained to us their projects: an oral history of a local midwife now in her seventies, who had been practicing medicine since the early days of the British occupation; and research on the position of nurses in the local economy and social attitudes towards nurses, who comprise a large part of the women's workforce. Then Sahar gave us some background on the center and its philosophy.

"I myself am an independent person, but as you can see from my writings, I'm very politicized.²⁰ What I mean by independent is that I'm not related organizationally to any political faction, and I believe that

feminism should not be a privilege of any particular faction or political group. Since we opened this center, we made a policy stating that we are not biased or prejudiced against any faction. It's open to everybody, and we have representatives from all the different committees including a number of religious women. The policy of this institution also states that we will provide the transportation for all young women coming from the villages, because I don't want this institution to become a copy of the Western feminist institutions, that is only for the high middle-class, privileged women. No, our feminism has to be all over. It is social achievement for everybody, not only for middle-class, white collar women.

"We care very much about developing relationships with women's organizations or women centers all around the world. We are waiting, in fact, for a women's organization in America to extend its hand, or her hand, to say, 'Here we are, women of the Women's Affairs, can we get together and make some kind of a relationship, fermented with good will, communication, better understanding, and cooperation?' Not just by visits, but also by working together.

"If a woman in the United States does not like the policy or the political opinion of a Palestinian woman like me, she can discuss it with me. It will enrich her intellect and it will enrich my intellect. Or maybe it will put me in the right direction, or it will put her in the right direction. But to open up to each other, to communicate, to raise questions, to forget that we come from a different color, from a different culture, from a different labeling, this is important, especially for feminists around the world. And I have studied feminism there in the United States, but I would like women in the U.S. particularly to apply this here, because this is the most critical spot in the world, I believe, and this is the great challenge. So I would be happy

if this would be transmitted to women's studies programs or American women would hear it."

Our meeting was interrupted because a Palestinian man had been killed in the streets of Nablus the night before. The shopkeepers were on strike, the *chabab* were burning tires in the street, and the Israelis threatened to impose a curfew. This meant that, after about an hour, the women had to hurry home, so as not to get caught in the street under curfew.

Women's Affairs and the Women's Work Committees, along with the general politicization of Palestinian women engaged in the nationalist struggle, have created "a revolution of rising expectations amongst Palestinian women; precisely , a consciousness change" (Giacaman 40). This change is manifest in debates among women on both national independence and on social issues, and in women's criticism of the national leadership. It is difficult for me to imagine any of the Palestinian women I met going backward, giving in to the external pressures of occupation and the conservative backlash within their society. Although these women often defined and described their experiences of struggle in different terms, they also spoke a communal language of resistance, a language, in Kitty Warnock's words "which supports individuals in their sufferings, turns their private grief into public strength, and is a powerful weapon of Palestinian resistance" (x). Their collective voices seemed to echo the words of Marie who said, "we must stay and keep on fighting"--on several fronts, with multiple strategies.

By way of departure

I read the headlines today in the New York Times. I wonder how my friends are enduring this sealing off of the territories, this apartheid separation (a metaphor not just of uncrossable boundaries, but also of squeezing the life out of a place).²¹ I think of the silences they suffer on the pages of the newspaper.

Palestinian poet Leila Say'igh writes "There's no glory in words when we escape to another land/And write them in its love and safety."²² I write now from the safety of my home in the U.S., a land that supports and subsidizes the Israeli occupation. But these Palestinian women speak from dangerous ground, from occupied territory, that they too might have an end to their travel.

Notes to Chapter 10: Interviews with Palestinian Women

¹Rita Giacaman, "Palestinian women, the *intifada*, and the state of independence," 35.

²Mahmud Darwish, "We Travel Like Other People," Victims of a Map (London: Zed Press) 31..

³In 1947, a partition plan was proposed by the U.N. offering 55% of historic Palestine to Jewish settlers. While Palestinians and Arab states rejected the original plan, and were in the process of negotiations, the British withdrew from the region. Zionist activists engaged in guerrilla warfare declared an exclusively Jewish state of Israel, driving Palestinians from their land. One of the notorious massacres of this period is Deir Yassin, in which 250 Palestinians lost their lives. See Albert Hourani, A History of Arab Peoples, 259-60, and Edward Said, The Question of Palestine.

⁴The majority of the women we met with were from the cities, rather than villages. I include here also one woman from a refugee camp in Gaza. Because of the language barrier (my Arabic is functional, but hardly fluent), some of these interviews were translated by other women in the committees, or with the help of a translator. Many Palestinians who have completed a secondary education speak English, if not fluently, at least with little difficulty. In this chapter, some members of the women's committee in Ramallah were translated by Rema, and Um Walid's interview in Gaza was translated by our guide, Bassam. Unless otherwise noted, all interviews were conducted by myself, Saba Mahmood, Rich Wood, and Tom Wright in August, 1991. Special thanks to the Palestinian women whose openness and strength of spirit inspired me to write this piece. In editing materials from these interviews, I attempted not speak for them, but to speak "nearby," so that their voices may be heard.

⁵I have changed the names of the Palestinians for their protection. In the case of public figures, however, I have used their real names here.

⁶The Israeli government has lowered the legal age of adulthood for Palestinians from 16 as stated by the U.N. to 12, so that young children can be held in prison. According to reports, children as young as 5 have been arrested and detained. See Graham Usher, "Children of Palestine," Race & Class, 32, 4 (1991): 1-18, esp. 15. Children are undoubtedly the most innocent victims of the occupation. For an excellent video documentary on this issue, see Mai Masri, Children of Fire (Open Space, BBC2, 22 October 1990). Also, for more current information on the increased killing of Palestinian children, see Stephen Sosebee, "Where Being a Palestinian Child is Punishable by Death," Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (March 1993) 25.

⁷*Hijab* is a form of veiling, usually a white scarf over the hair and tied under the chin. *Jilbab* is a long, long-sleeved dress.

⁸From "Facts on the Ground: Israeli Settlements in Occupied Palestine," Anata Video Production (Seattle, December 1991).

⁹See "Her People's Voice: Facing a reluctant Israel, Hanan Ashrawi speaks for the Palestinians," People (March 9, 1992): 65-68. This portrayal of the Palestinian cause repeats the stereotypes of Islam and Arab men that I discuss especially in chapter three.

¹⁰This August 1989 interview was conducted by Tom Wright and Rich Wood, and used by permission.

¹¹Hanan Ashrawi, reported in "Words to Remember: Round 7 of the Middle East Peace Talks," The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs Vol. XI, no. 6 (December 1992/January 1993) 21.

¹²The rise in Islamic fundamentalism within the territories has been "coaxed by Israel and fuelled by despair of any political solution." See Graham Usher, "Interview with Rita Giacaman," 32.

¹³These include the Palestinian Women's Committees for Social Work, the Union of Palestinian Work Committees, the Union of Working Women's Committees and the Women's Action Committees. They are allied, respectively, to the four main nationalist factions that make up the PLO--Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestinian People's (formerly Communist) Party, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. For the purposes of this chapter, I have only included the women's particular affiliation when they mentioned it themselves within the interview.

¹⁴Fatah is the mainstream faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

¹⁵Muscovia is an Israeli prison in West Jerusalem that is known for its torture center.

¹⁶*Chabab* is the Arabic term for youth, or young men. In Palestine, the *chabab* often wear kaffiyeh's, the traditional black and white checked scarf, over their faces to protect their anonymity as they participate in a significant arm of the resistance--including demonstrations, stone-throwing, graffiti, and delivering to homes leaflets issued by the unified leadership. They also represent the largest number of Palestinians imprisoned or killed during the uprising.

¹⁷"Administrative detention" is a term used to describe the imprisonment of Palestinians within the territories *without charges or trial*. Under Israeli law, administrative detention can last for a period between six months to one year, and is renewable.

¹⁸The U.S. government has consistently supported Israel in its violation of international law. In this case, the U.S. signed the unanimous U.N. resolution 799, which calls for the immediate and safe return of all the

deportees, then rescinded its decision by supporting the Israeli government's refusal to comply with the resolution. At the same time, the U.S. was bombing Iraq for what they called a violation of U.N Security Council resolutions adopted at the end of the Gulf War, displaying an obvious double standard applied by the U.S. government when it comes to enforcing U.N. resolutions against Israel.

¹⁹This interview was conducted by Jackie Woolf, Rich Wood, and Tom Wright, and used by permission.

²⁰See, for example, Sahar Khalifeh, Wild Thorns (Olive Branch Press, 1976), or "Memoirs of an Unrealistic Woman" in Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (New York: Columbia UP, 1992).

²¹At the time of writing, the occupied territories have been sealed off from Israel for over two months, so that Palestinians are not allowed to enter their jobs in Israel, to attend their places of worship, or to see relatives and friends in other parts of the territories. This Israeli tactic is creating further economic and emotional hardship for the Palestinians.

²²Leila Say'igh, "The Glory of Difficult Words," my translation.

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