

İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY  
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MIRROR MIRROR ON MY PEN:  
STRUGGLE, IDENTITY AND THE COMPENSATION OF LONELINESS  
IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES OF MIDDLE EASTERN  
WOMEN WRITERS IN EXILE

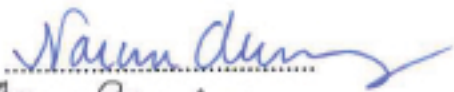
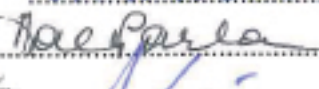
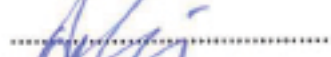
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(AYNA AYNA, YAZ BENİ:  
ORTA DOĞULU SÜRGÜN KADIN YAZARLARIN OTOBİYOGRAFİK  
ANLATILARINDA YALNIZLIĞIN TELAFİSİ, MÜCADELE VE KİMLİK)

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- 2) Middle East
- 3) Autobiography
- 4) Authorship
- 5) Identity

## PROLOGUE

Considering the fact that modern Turkey is facing an immense crisis of immigration and the steps it continuously fails to take, having an analytical look at the nature of displacement is imperative for Turkish individuals not only to have a better understanding of neighboring countries but also to become familiar with the modern dynamics of the country and world one is living in. Literature perseveres as long as it continues to convey humanity in all its timeless and universal aspects and allows for people from different time periods and geographies to speak a language that is legible to all. Reading the autobiographies of Middle Eastern women who have to live in places that are far away from the countries they had to leave behind, the autobiographies that bear the scar of the motherland they are unable to return to, allows for a better understanding of the world we live in today.

The apparent shortage of literature delving in how Middle Eastern women in exile write their own lives and thus form and build new identities, and the scarcity of the theories present in analyzing the literature of women who have had to leave their countries of origin because of social or political crises has pushed me to believe that an analysis such as this one may prove beneficial in widening and democratizing the discourse.

Leigh Gilmore, in her book, “Autobiographics”, writes that “In autobiography the name has several functions: it identifies a person within a historical context of place and patrilineage, and focuses attention on the solid corporeality to which it refers.” (Gilmore, 1995) Throughout this thesis I’ve used the first names of the authors when referring to them, rather than their last names. These were authors who have been exiled from their patriarchal cultures, who have had to re-build their identities in foreign lands and who have pointed to this newly claimed identity in their autobiographies. I found it more in line with the philosophy of the analysis to not refer to them with the names that have been bequeathed upon them by law and patriarchal traditions. I chose to refer to them by

their first names, which were more often than not given (and in a way, passed on) to them by their mothers. In a way, their first names were inherited from their mothers.

Furthermore, at least two of the authors I got to analyze here had mothers who were divorced, and hence had different last names from their daughters, or their daughters' fathers. This meant that referring to the authors with their last names would have grouped the authors solely with their fathers, instead of in an association that also included the mothers. As it would have been possible to use the authors' last names when referring to the fathers, using the first names of the authors felt more fitting symbolically in allowing them an individualist space of their own.

Talat Parman remarks the distinction between the first name and the last name in his article, *Adına Sürgün Olmak (Exiled to a Name)*. According to Parman, "It is our first name that we gain with our birth, as our family name has already existed in pre-historic times. Our first name is what we are personally entrusted with. It is rather a donation. The first name makes an individual out of a person, amongst a group of people who share the same family name." (Parman, 2014) The propinquity between the first name, autobiography and exile in terms of making an individual out of a person has pushed me to use the first names of the authors throughout the analysis, rather than the family names that are also useful in referring to various father figures in the author's family.

Moreover, it is a Western tradition to use the family name of a person when speaking to or about that person, saying Miss/Ms./Mr. (Family Name). However, it is more customary in the Middle West to use (First Name) Sister/Brother/Uncle/Aunt; hence making it all the more proper to speak of them using their first names.

### **Why these works?**

I discussed the autobiographical narratives of women who were born and raised in the Middle East, who had to leave their countries for political reasons and wrote biographies in the new (usually Western) countries with a new identity and a new life, talking about

the women who used to live in the countries they had to run away from. The exiled women writers discussed here hail from various countries like Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Iran and have left these countries for different others like France, USA or Britain. Some already had a profession and a professional identity, some had formed their own families, and some had never worked a day before in their lives and had not yet proven themselves.

In the works I've selected for this analysis, there are life narratives of women who have had to flee their countries because their ideologies were frowned upon by authorities, women whose conditions of life worsened with the upending wars, and women who had to run away from the pressures of tyrannical leaders. They come from different countries, different ages and socio-economic groups; they cite different reasons for leaving their countries. What they have in common however, is that already in their motherland they had formed an identity of struggle, they were coming from a place dubbed the "Middle East" by the West, they all lived in exile and having lost their countries, and of course that they were writers.

Almost all the autobiographies here (except for that of Shusha Guppy) were also written after the Gulf War. All the autobiographies were written after the formation of the state Israel and the apparent defeat of Palestine (and the rest of the Arab nations). These two breaking points have proven crucial in the forming of opinions of the Western world towards the Arabic and Middle Eastern identities and it was important to create a sense of temporal unity by selecting books written after these two historical milestones for analysis.

## **Thanks**

I would like to thank both my parents, my mother Meral Mehtap Elaidi Omur and my father Korkut Omur, for providing me with the psychological, mental and economical support I needed to build an identity that surpassed the traditions and pressures of a patriarchal society, and for never limiting my life or my dreams because I was born a girl.

I would also like to thank my sister and my soul mate, Lal Omur, for believing in the dream of a world that provides equal opportunities for men and women, for showing me the comfort and ease of solidarity, interdependency and of a collectivist identity for listening to me throughout the writing process, never getting bored of what they heard and still remaining curious of what I was about to say.

I would also like to thank my partner in life, Salih Sinan Bilal, with whom I've lived many lives before, for helping me in my struggle in determining a thesis I would care and have passion about, in reaching a statement amongst the heaps of reading I had to do, and for the questions he asked throughout my sleepless nights, topics he continued to listen to and for his unwavering belief in me from the first letter of the thesis until the last sentence.

To my workplace and office BKM, I am grateful because they allowed me the time I needed to read, write and finalize my thesis, especially in most hectic time of production schedule for us. I would especially like to thank Zümür Arol Bekçe and Necati Akpınar for their kindness and understanding.

And finally, I would like to thank Professor Doctor Nazan Aksoy for her guidance in finding a topic that was still relevant today, that had not been researched to death, for showing me the riddles of autobiography and her direction, attention and time in the formation of my thesis topic.

I believe in the possibility of a world of travellers, rather than exiles.

Until that day, with hope, with zeal, with grief...

To the memory of my grandfather Mehmet Elaidi, the first exile I met...

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## ÖZET

Ana vatan ve egemen kültür Orta Doğulu kadınları büyürken bir deli gömleği gibi sarar. Onlara biçilen gömleği kabul etmeyen bazı kadınlar bu duruma yine erkeksi bir edim olarak görülen yazarlıkla baş kaldırırılar. Yazmak, böyle kültürlerde kadınlara biçilen geleneksel role daha en başından karşı çıkmaktır. Mücadeleci kimlikleri ve kültürlerindeki çalkantılar sebebiyle ülkelerinden kaçmak zorunda kalıp yeni bir kültür ve ülkeye gittiklerinde bu gömlekten de kurtulurlar, bu defa yeni (Batılı) bir kültürün onlara biçtiği dar bir kimlikle karşı karşıya kalırlar. Kimliklerini yeniden kurgularken sürgünün dayattığı yalnızlığı da kırmak için kolektif bir kimlik anlatısına dönen bu mücadeleci kadınlar, çoktan yitirdikleri ve babalarına kıyasla daha geleneksel buldukları anneleriyle bir yüzleşmeye otururlar. Anneyle yeniden ve yazı sayesinde kurdukları bağ, onları geleneksel olana, yitirdikleri anavatana, anadilin kolaylıklarına kavuşturur. Otobiyografileri, annelerini yeniden bulmaları ve kalabalık, bağlantısal bir kimlik kurgulamaları ile onlara yitirdiklerinin yarasını saran bir alan açar. Aynada kendilerine bakar, ve baktıkları yerde, yüzlerinde, isimlerinde kalabalık bir resim bulurlar.

## ABSTRACT

Motherland and the dominant cultural codes wrap the Middle-Eastern women individuals like a straightjacket. Women who object to wear this straightjacket rebel by writing, an activity that is considered to be for male endeavor. Writing is rebelling against the traditional roles reserved for women in cultures like this. As they challenge norms and rules, and because of the conflicts that keep on rising in their territories, these women have to flee their countries to live in a new culture and a different country. Once in their adopted (Western) culture, they are now presented with a new straightjacket. When they start to re-build their identities in this foreign land and in order to dissolve the loneliness exile brings about with it, they revert to a referential identity and embark on a journey to

confront their long-lost mothers whom they have always found to be more traditional than their fathers. The bond re-created through writing and with the mother allows for the writers to re-connect with their motherland, mother tongue, with what they deem traditional. Through finding their mother and building a referential, collectivist and crowded identity, their autobiographies help create a safe space tending the open wounds of exile. They look in the mirror and see a crowded picture where their faces and names exist.

## INTRODUCTION

We no longer live in a world of growing roots but rather of breaking them, of trying to find the etiquette of a life without an anchor. We inhabit a time and period where sixty five million people have been displaced, ten million people are left without a country, and over twenty million people are considered immigrants. (According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees data) In 2016, the countries where most citizens asked for asylum were Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis. Because of the war that erupted in Syria in 2011, almost ten million Syrians had to leave their homes, and almost five million people who were now without a home had to seek asylum in Turkey. (The Syrian refugee crisis and its repercussions for the EU) The Middle East is, as it has been for ages, still the territory of chaos, confusion and loss...

Understanding the need to build a new identity in a foreign culture and different country, and what it means to have lost one's place, country and home is of utmost importance today. Displaced people, and especially women, face struggles in war-torn and conflict-ridden Middle Eastern countries they eventually have to leave behind, and also have a similar struggle in their adopted lands in order to be true to their characters and personal choices. By ensuring the voices of silenced peoples be heard, a plural and democratized discourse can come about when talking about women's issues in non-Western countries. Autobiography allows a safe space for people who have been silenced, ignored and thus is one of the most democratic narrative choices because it allows for language and writing to be passed on to those who have been left out of the discourse.

Exiled Arabic authors' books have begun to be published prominently around the 1980s and 1990s. According to Miriam Cooke, a new kind of writing, a sort of autobiographic Islamic feminist discourse appears after the 1990s. Cooke assert that in these autobiographical narratives, women like Nawal el Saadawi write of their struggles against religious figures who expect women to dress and behave in accordance with their religious affiliations. (Cooke & Golley, 2007) In her book, "Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrzad Tells Her Story", Nawal Al Hassan Golley states that many

Muslim North African and Middle Eastern countries use the female figure when rebuilding a national identity, once freed from the colonizing pressures. Hence how women's education, the way they dress in public and the health services they are provided with always become the domain of new reforms and find themselves in the spotlight of modernization practices. (Golley, 2007) Both Zainab Salbi and Shusha Guppy who have been discussed here in this thesis have been raised in a period where religious pressures have declined and a –forced- modernization process has been implemented. Nawal el Saadawi on the other hand, has grown up standing up to a system that pressured women to stay true to traditional roots while the country rid itself of colonial influence. All the women writers analyzed here, including Hanan al Shaykh, have been subjected to and witness of both an attempt at modernity characterized through the woman figure, as well as an attempt to stay true to traditions that is once again characterized through women. Emphasizing these conflicting pressures in their autobiographies, these women also voice their discomfort towards Western prejudices concerning Middle Eastern women. These authors thus get to occupy a place of dissidence.

Once thrown away from the cultures against which they have built a dissenter identity, and thrown into exile from a country they were born and raised in, these Middle Eastern women writers find that they constitute an Other in the new country as well. An Other that misses the country that has given up on them. In their (auto)biographies, these authors write their way back into their childhoods when trying to re-gain the referentiality they have lost with the loss of their motherland. Throughout this writing process, these women try to build an identity that does away with the solitude of exile. They ensure this through integrating the stories of women they have been raised by, into their autobiographies and by re-defining their relationships with fathers and father figures. By allowing for the women from their lives to be present in the writing, these authors are able to break the silence that has been imposed by both the Middle Eastern traditions on women as well as the silence expected by the Western countries of Middle Eastern women. Women writers here break not only their own silences, but also the silences of all women forced to fit into either of these stereotypes.

The autobiographies written in exile are also a way of re-instating a relationship with the mother. For women who have been exiled from a motherland, a mother tongue and the physical being of the mother herself, a symbolic exile also takes place as a divergence from the mother figure. For, as Mona Fayed states, the woman figure as a historical figure remains most often used in the allegory of “mother-world-country.” (tasnim, 2013) As long as this connection between the motherland and the mother remains a constant, the individual (author) who breaks away from her country and her mother has been subjected into a double dis-identification. Florence Ramod Journey also delves into this topic in her article “*Exile and Relation to the Mother/Land in Edwidge Danticat’s Breath Eyes Memory and The Farming of Bones*” asserting that exile is double-ended by nature. Exile de-centers the identity and self and by doing so ignites the possibility of a more recent and more complicated identity formation. (Journey, 2001) The going back and forth between the exiled country and the motherland, according to Journey, forms the search for a new identity. In all of the authors mentioned here, the abyss opened by the loss of a motherland is marked by the mother figure. In re-imagining a more complicated identity, the face these authors see when they look in the mirror is that of their mother’s. The new identity only becomes apparent through confrontation and identification with the mother.

Women writers exiled from post-colonial Middle-Eastern countries show a tendency toward autobiographies to re-gain what they have lost twice. The first thing they lose with exile is obviously their homes; swept away from their countries and cultures, they enter a state of symbolic homelessness. The second threat of loss surfaces as their identities are threatened by the oversimplifications in the new country they’ve escaped to. Women writers analyzed here compensate for the threat of both these losses and try to re-build the worlds they already lost with exile, through autobiographies and re-build their lives (and thus their identities). They claim and save their homes and identities in this manner. They manage to both challenge the West, who they feel is responsible for the conflicts in their countries, and re-connect with the countries they have lost. When defining and defending their identities, they follow a referential way as they did in their

collectivist cultures, thus obviating the feelings of solitude and isolation imposed on them by exile.

When writing autobiographies, Middle Eastern women who have lost their countries and who now live in exile, return to the countries they lost and the cultures that have identified them as inferior. When talking about their struggles “back home” they also address Western readers who belong to the countries they live in now. This way, they can challenge both the Western prejudices they are exposed to in exile, as well as the expectations of their Middle Eastern cultures that have played an imperative part in the formation of their dissenter identity. This way they doubly oppose the identities forced on them, defending the identity they build for themselves. Autobiography becomes a manifestation and verification of their true identity against an East that expects them to obey patriarchal rules and the newly-‘adopted’ Western country that assumes they have obeyed those rules.

## **Exile**

In his article, “*Key figure of mobility: the exile*” Andreas Hackl argues that exiled writers play a key role in forming a social and academic perception of exile. (Hackl, 2017) Allowing for women’s narratives and literary works (that find less opportunity and space when compared to their male counterparts’) to be included in the formation of a social and academic perception of exile enables for a more thorough and accurate understanding of exile to come about.

Psychoanalysis provides an extensive space when analyzing autobiographies written in exile. One of the ways in which it can achieve this is Bruce Mazlish’s way referred by Friedman in his article, *Autobiography and Psychoanalysis*. Mazlish points to the technique of autobiography where the past is specifically re-configured and re-told, also pointing to its similarity to the interpretation process of psychoanalysis. (Friedman, 1998) Dawne McCance elaborates on Kristeva in her article *Julia Kristeva and the Ethics of Exile*, saying that Kristeva believed that analysis doesn’t free an individual towards

defining that person, it rather takes a record of the already existing crisis. As well as revealing the idiosyncrasy of the individual and showing the plurality of possible identifications, analysis also uncovers the relativity of identity. (McCance, 1990) Psychoanalysis is a functional way of understanding the fragmented identity of exile; as to be able to mourn for a loss, one has to first tell its story, re-configure it and name the crisis caused by the loss.

Exile is the wound, the loss and the crisis at the same time. Joseph Ludin speaks of how the nature of exile nourishes and marks narcissism. Ludin likens this to the relationship a small child has with their wound. According to Ludin, just like the child revels in pride at the sight of the dressed wound, with exile too, the wound becomes the focus point and is deferred at the same time. (Ludin, 2014) The writing process for the exiled writers who decide to write their life stories is a way of both, showcasing the wounds as Ludin says, as well as curing and ameliorating the wound. Ludin also asserts in the same article that psychoanalysis in exiled people, as a process, allows for exile to get a face, thus allowing the individual to mourn for the things that are already lost. Similarly, the authors who decide to write autobiographies go back to their childhoods, becoming adept at building realistic identities through revelations found in their journeys.

Exile also marks a transiency, homelessness by nature. Bella Brodzki declares in her article *Mothers, Displacement, and Language* that the autobiography-writing author is already an immigrant/a homeless person. According to Brodzki, to speak and write from a self-referential point of view means to live nowhere, discursively, epistemologically and ontologically. Brodzki believes this immigrant state doubles in feminist autobiography writers as a feminist autobiography writer is already looking for ways of discussion and self-representation in a patriarchal world. (Brodzki, Smith & Watson, 1998) The writing of a life-narrative in a patriarchal culture generates a state of immigrancy and homelessness. The women author who embarks on a journey to write herself when deracinated from her country has to tackle this homelessness twice. Because although the individual might go back to the country she was exiled from, she can never return home again. As Helene Cixous writes in her novel, *So Close*; “Too late we learned

that we were children of Algiers, at that moment we were invaded by a feeling of immigration, but once started towards Paris, there was absolutely no possible turning back, one couldn't go back down the staircase at Bugeaud.” (Cixous, 28)

The first trauma of exile is never being able to return home again. Edward Said explains in his article, *Reflections on Exile*, that the mere condition of not being able to return home is enough to make a person an exile but he still distinguishes between “exiles, immigrants, expatriates and émigrés”, saying there's a factual difference between these groups. According to Said, the word, *immigrant* contains within itself political connotations that evoke images of helpless and blameless groups of people. Exile, on the other hand carries connotations of loneliness and spirituality according to Said. Ludin mentions in his article, *Exile, Roots, Crisis (Sürgün, Kök, Kriz)* that a person can only assert her/his presence by being a member of a group. As long as that person does not go against traditions, s/he can continue being a member of that society and it is difficult for that person to be an individual. However, the exiled person has to be an individual. (Ludin, 2014) Authors mentioned here in this thesis are women who have gone against tradition and thus they are already exiles before they have even left their countries.

Struggling with the solitude brought about by being torn apart from their countries, and the disconnect they feel from their societal membership because of the physical and psychological nature of exile, women writers analyzed here are forced into individualization. When dealing with these feelings of solitude and forced individualization, these authors decide to get a pen and paper and write their autobiographies. Although the main motivation behind this writing act may look like the desire to make sure what they lived through are taken into record, there is an even stronger underlying motivation: they've been excluded from their social identities into a lonely one. Hence, wanting to save themselves from the loneliness of exile and attempting to recreate the social identity they have just lost, or to at least feel the sense of belonging necessary for the conservation of their identities, they sit down to write autobiographies where they act as mirrors for the people who have been present in their lives, thus reflecting their lonely selves through a crowded mirror.

Ludin believes that exile results in the loss of belonging, an experience of separation, a worry of castration and that these can mix with each other, in the end resulting in the exiled person to become wounded with feelings of loss. In Ludin's opinion this engenders a loss of identity in the exiled person. (Ludin, 2014)

It is worth mentioning at this point that Middle Eastern women writers who've been exiled, chose to emphasize and reflect the identities they've formed back in their homelands, despite having already become exiles there – in Ludin's sense – because of not having abided by the rules and traditions of the culture into which they were born. Writing autobiographies is the only way to widen their spaces that were restricted by exile, as well as to heal the wounds that exile has opened. As Fatma Altzinger says in her article, "*Exile and that Which is Traumatic in Exile*" (original: *Sürgün ve Sürgünde Travmatik Olan*), the exiled person can only create a space for herself when she discovers a creative path between herself and that which is traumatic. (Altzinger, 2014)

### **How female is 'exile'?**

The mere act of being an exile, the forced relocation from one's own country itself marks the female identity's digression from patriarchy. Vytautas Kovalis points to the prevalent impression in his article *Women Writers in Exile* that up until recently exile was thought to be a male experience. (Kovalis, 1992) Exile is perceived as a punishment given by nation states to political and intellectual actions and according to Kovalis these actions have a 'male' connotation. Women authors who have been forced to leave their homes because of their intellectual and political activities break this mold first and foremost. Exile, when used as a punishment to a woman, in and of itself indicates that a woman has been able to get a life outside her home.

Nawal el Saadawi has to leave her country because her name has been added to a death list; Zainab Salbi accepts an arranged marriage and leaves for the USA because her family can't struggle free from the grasp of Saddam and she fears she will never escape

this social prison either. Hanan al Shaykh and her mother Kamila abandon Lebanon because of the ravaging war in their country that makes it difficult for them to lead safe lives. Shusha Guppy leaves Iran to go to college in Paris and after the Iranian Revolution she loses the homeland she's known and loved.

Mahnaz Afkhami's compilation of life narratives of exile women, aptly titled "Women in Exile", includes the life narrative of Palestinian Hala Deeb Jabbour. Hala Deeb's narrative emphasizes her husband's inability to adapt to their new life in exile. Unlike her husband who's having difficulties breaking ties with the past and who's afraid of a new life experience, Hala Deeb is a Palestinian and a woman and she has grown up with the concept of exile and has made her peace with it already. Exile to Hala Deeb Jabbour is a place where no one belongs anywhere, a sort of no man's land. (Jabbour & Afkhami, 1994) And women are much more accustomed to feelings of homelessness and solitude as opposed to men who have grown up advantaged in patriarchal cultures.

Despite all the hardships and wounds inflicted on the individual by the concept of exile, exile also can be empowering, especially for women who have been cast aside as an Other and who oppose this categorization and treatment with fervor, as it provides such exiled women a chance to re-build an identity.

### **What does 'Middle Eastern women' entail?**

Chandra Talpade Mohanty believes that Western feminisms build a category of 'third world woman' as the victim of various cultural and socio-economic systems. According to Mohanty, women are grouped into this category without taking their social status, race or ethnicity into account. (Mohanty, 1988) Middle Eastern women can't be considered similar just because they hail from the same territory titled the Middle East, of course. Regardless, there are obviously similarities in the way the impulses of their cultures effect their identity constructs and life narratives. For the women writers in this dissertation, being considered an Other in the countries they have been exiled to also forms a commonality between them.

It is inevitable for there to be differences between these autobiographies as well as similarities. The most important divergence is perhaps the language used in the autobiographies and the assumed audience of the works. Nazan Aksoy writes in her book, "Fictionalized Selfhoods" (original name: "Kurgulanmış Benlikler") that "Women who have been relocated to a secondary position for a long historical time are inclined to adopt the male language when voicing their own worlds through writing." According to Aksoy, "Those who are declined power have to borrow the language of those who have power. These women authors speak a male language." (Aksoy, 109) Zainab Salbi and Shusha Guppy write their autobiographies in exile, in English and both their books get published first in Western countries. Hence, the language of the powerful gains a multicultural aspect in both these authors, symbolizing a very apparent break from mother tongue for them. On the other hand, Nawal el Saadawi and Hanan al Shaykh write their (auto)biographies in Arabic and both their works are first published in countries where the official language is Arabic. This can be seen as an attempt at holding on to their ties with their mother tongue despite having had to sever ties with their countries.

When listing the characteristics that entail what Western critics see as a women's language in women autobiographies, Aksoy lists "not placing much importance on in-text consistency, a fragmented text, frequent use of anecdotes, frequent digressions from topic, quoting the ideas of other authors, inclining towards a more personal, emotional language rather than a fluent one." (Aksoy, 109) In a relative vein, Stanton mentions Bruss' theory in his article, Bruss states that despite being very permitting of a chronological narrative, autobiography inclines towards fragmented narratives instead, broken tellings of events, and competing foci points. (Stanton, Smith & Watson, 1998) This technical choice points towards a desire for the construction of identity rather than a motivation for telling history as it happened from the author's perspective. In the autobiographies analyzed in this dissertation; it is possible to come across fragmented narratives, frequent usage of anecdotes, digression from the topic and thematic narrative structure in the telling of events rather than a chronological one.

## **Speaking of a Personal Life / What's Personal and What's Public**

Fadiqa Faqir, in her book, "In the house of silence: autobiographical essays by Arab women writers" pinpoints the 1990s as when autobiography in its modern sense rose in Arabic literature. When she looks at the autobiographic works written since then, she finds out there is an obvious difference between men and women autobiography writers. In autobiographies written by men, the I in the narrative is that of the author, the self is created for the purpose of becoming immortal, not to be erased. In women's autobiographical writing however the concept of the self lacks the certitude present in men's autobiographies in terms of the self's authority in history and language. (Faqir, Loc164) However, in the autobiographies that are analyzed here, the women writers have already left their countries and cultures behind, having proven their worth in foreign lands and therefore do not share this characteristic of anxiety or doubt regarding the authority of the self.

Aksoy remarks how women who have proven themselves outside their homes and in public spheres are reluctant to talk about their personal lives, husbands or children. An exception to this inclination, she says, exists in the autobiography Halide Edib Adivar wrote in English. Unlike the women authors in Aksoy's analysis who wrote in their native language and in the beginning of the Republic, the women authors mentioned in this thesis have all left their homes, have had to live in countries foreign to them, without the hope of a return, and (except for Shusha Guppy) who have all written their autobiographies after the 1990s. For two reasons, they are able to easily write of their personal lives and about their families, love and sex lives. One reason is that by way of being in exile, they are already considered public and political figures. The fact that they are exiles is now a big and integral part of their public identities. The other reason is that because they have had to escape their countries and cultures of origin, the societal pressures they might have otherwise felt in writing if they were still in their homeland, no longer bind them. Thus they feel free to comfortably write about their personal lives.

Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, in her book “Reading Arab women's autobiographies: Shahrazad tells her story” takes a look at Huda Sha’arawi’s autobiography, remarking on how she never wrote anything that would have been morally unseemly of an Egyptian higher class women at that time. (Al-Hassan Golley, Loc 1127) Huda Sha’ara’wi’s choice makes sense considering she had lived her whole life in Egypt. However, the women authors of this dissertation choose to write their life narratives once they are away from their homelands. There is no reason for them to shy away from topics like sex, husbands, and sexual desires in a way that might be perceived offensive in a Middle Eastern Islamic country. They are free to discuss these topics at depth, or to their liking without a fear of social reprimand.

Not only are these women able to write about their personal and sexual lives comfortably, they also base their works on the political, social and historical events that take part in their countries and personal histories. Negating the preconceived notion that women are inclined to write about the affairs of the home, while men write about the grand scheme of things, war and politics, these women adopt a political language when writing about their lives. As they write about their lives, mostly after the 1990s, after being thrown away from their languages and countries, as they reconstruct history, they reclaim the discourse of their own presence and through writing attempt to make up for the sorrow of having lost a country and a possibility.

## TURKEY AND MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURES

### READING EACH OTHER

The reason why I chose Middle Eastern women writers as the topic of my thesis was because I believe sharing of a geographical position and territory also enables the sharing of a culture or sometimes a destiny. Middle Eastern women, no matter what sort of different acclimations and countries they come from, still share a similar identity in the eyes of the ‘West.’

However, despite this belief in a shared culture and identity, I was only able to find these literary works in a Western language, English. None of the works I analyzed here were published in Turkish; which meant I had to read them all in English. Thus I used the English-translated names of all the places, stories and people that showed up in the works as this was the language I got to read about them.

### Turkey’s ‘Middle Eastern Women’ Prejudice

How to explain the disinterest between cultures and countries that are geographically so close to each other, that share a commonality named the Middle Eastern culture and the unfortunate fate of recurring political and cultural conflicts? Turkey’s desire to situate itself as a Western country and its consequent efforts at distancing itself from a Middle Eastern identity may be one of the culprits.

In his article “*The Perception of Threat and the Somatic Reaction*” (original name: “*Tehdit Algısı ve Omurilik Tepkisi*”) Murat Paker explains the sense of defeat and frustration Turkish people feel towards the West and says, “There is a Westernization process that is 150-200 years old. There is a conclusive and sharpened desire to become more Westernized since the foundation of the Republic. Why is it so? Because we were

defeated. We have to be like them in order to get over it.”\*<sup>1</sup> (Paker, 42) Similarly, the journalist Oral Çalışlar wrote in his June 2010 op-ed titled “*Turks and Arabs*” that “Turkey turned its back to the East as it turned its face towards the West. This is why we looked at the East with Western eyes. That’s how we were trained.” (Çalışlar, 2010)<sup>2</sup> Overcoming this sense of defeat can only be achieved by mimicking the West, and adapting to its traditions. It is possible to see traces of this historical context in the Western prejudices Turkish individuals have towards Middle Eastern cultures and women who come from such cultures. Certain ideologies in the West however save the same prejudices for Turkish women’s identities as well.

Edward Said mentions a different kind of defeat in his article “*Reflections on Exile*”. To Said, the 1948 Palestine events have caused a sense of collective defeat for the entire Arab community. This is a sense of defeat shared by Arabs who aren’t Palestinian as well, since her/his language and religious and cultural traditions now leave him suspicious now at every step s/he takes. (Said, Loc 1263)

It may thus be possible to connect Turkey’s disinterest towards its neighboring Middle Eastern cultures to a sort of common fate. Cultures that feel defeated and are frustrated with this feeling don’t find strength in the similarities they share with other defeated nations. On the contrary, the more similar they look, the more uncomfortable they make each other. Considering this commonality between their fates, that Middle Eastern women writers barely mention Turkey or Turkish culture may be understood in a similar manner.

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<sup>1</sup> “Aslında 150-200 yıllık bir Batılılaşma serüveni var, Cumhuriyetten beri iyice artmış, kesinleşmiş ve keskinleşmiş bir Batılılaşma arzusu var. Neden var? Çünkü yenildik. Batı’ya yenildik. Onlar gibi olmalıyız ki, durumu kurtarabilelim.” (Paker, 42)

<sup>2</sup> “Türkiye, yüzünü Batı’ya dönerken sırtını da Doğu’ya döndü. Bu nedenle bizler Doğu’ya Batı’nın gözüyle baktık. O şekilde eğitildik” (Çalışlar, 2010)

## **Middle East's Perception of Turkey**

Maher Jarrar speaks of the connotation of the word watan (homeland) in his prologue, “*Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature: A Preliminary Outline*”. According to Jarrar, prior to the colonizing efforts in Arabic cultures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of *watan* provided an ‘affirmative collective identity’ for individuals, marking the movable space for a tribe. After the involvement of European modernity in Arabic nations and through the effect of global and international forces, the word watan goes through a transformation of connotations, being influenced by European nationalisms. (Günther, Milich, & Jarrar, 2016) Jarrar believes that through breaking away from the Ottoman Empire and through the haphazard borders drawn by European nations, Middle Eastern countries begin to construct new national identities.

Despite their geographical closeness and historical relations as well as cultural similarities, Turkey, Turkish culture or the Ottoman Empire does not play into the autobiographies mentioned in this dissertation at all. Sometimes a short sentence about Turkey or a Turkish idiom does find its way into the narrative, but it is not possible to discern the authors’ points of views about Turkey.

Nawal El Saadawi speaks of a time when, after Egypt topples down monarchy and becomes a republic, certain titles get abolished. Nawal speaks of the fervor of the people on the streets and how somebody says “Now, uncle, there is nothing called Pasha or Bey. Pasha is not an Arabic word, it is Turkish, we inherited it from the reign of the Osmanlis and the Mamelukes.” (El Saadawi, 54) Land reform (and development) thus becomes the anti-thesis of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman Empire’s affect on Egypt is situated within a feudal heritage and once land reform takes place, the abolishment of this heritage is celebrated.

Just like Egypt, Iraq is also a country that has been through a colonial rule. Although Lebanon was never a colony, it has lived through a similar experience since it was a

French mandate. It is even possible to say that the women who were born and raised in these countries see the Ottoman Empire in a similar light, as a colonial force.

Hanan al Shaykh, writes of the time when her grandmother and grandfather led a happy life in Turkey up until the First World War. With the shortages and compulsory military service brought about because of the war, they had to flee and thus their lives got turned upside down. (Al Shaykh, 36) When talking about Kamila's second husband, Muhammad's father, Hanan also writes "His father was renowned for having fought against the Turks and for his great strength." (Al Shaykh, 191)

In contrast, Iran was never colonized or never lived through a similar experience, never was a part of Ottoman Empire. Perhaps for this reason, it is not possible to find anything about the Ottoman Empire in Shusha Guppy's autobiography. In her autobiography, when they are talking about a man who works for them, who is of Turkish origin, Shusha writes very briefly, "Mother told the family that Ali was a good man, honest and hard-working, though somewhat autocratic and stubborn, which was 'not surprising in a Turk!'" (Guppy, 85)

### **Mirror Mirror on the Wall: Who Is the Face I See Before Me?**

Stanford Friedman, in his article, "*Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice*" talks about the empowering and transforming effect that might arise from a women's embrace of a collectivist identity. (Friedman, 1998) Stanford mentions Rowbotham who believes that when women are forced into shallow cultural representations, this might make them an Other, but it can also enable them to raise a new kind of awareness about themselves. According to Rowbotham, women may do away with this othering and in solidarity with other women, eventually shape a new identity to represent themselves. The same can be said about Middle Eastern women who are forced to fit certain molds.

One of the recurring symbolic objects in Middle Eastern exiled women writers' autobiographies is the image of a mirror. Liana Badr's life narrative in the compilation "In the House of Silence (Arab Women Writers)" begins with her mother's repeated warnings to stay away from mirrors. Because of this warning Liana tries to keep away from mirrors but asks herself how one could communicate with oneself without the aid of an object that undertakes the dialogue with the soul. The mirror, according to Liana has a weird affect on the person, pushing the individual to look at oneself and the world around him/her, pushing the individual into madness. (Badr & Faqir, 1998)

In her compilation book, "Women in Exile", Mahnaz Afkhami, tells her own story of being trapped in exile. The narrative begins with Mahnaz getting a call from her husband in Iran and continues on with her conflicted emotions about an exile she was not at all prepared for. Progressing as a stream of consciousness, the narrative focuses on Mahnaz's experiences, successes and belongings she's left behind as the General Secretary of Iranian Women's Association. As her business trip in New York turns into exile with the ring of a phone, Mahnaz is faced with the question "Who am I?" She writes; "For a decade I had defined myself by my place within the Iranian women's movement. The question "Who am I?" was answered not by indicating gender, religion, nationality, or family ties but by my position as the secretary general of the Women's Organization of Iran, a title that described my profession, indicated my cause, and defined the philosophic framework for my existence." (Afkhami, 3) Upon Mahnaz's acceptance of the exile she's been thrown into, she realizes despite the hardships and pain, an exciting process has also begun. This process is colored by the question, "Who do I want to be?" Exile becomes a mandatory mirror into which one must gaze in order to remain sane and be in control of one's identity.

### **Mother's Role in the Construction of Identity**

Florence Ramond Journey writes of the difference between female Bildungsroman and the male Bildungsroman in her article "*Exile and Relation to the Mother/Land in Edwidge Danticat's Breath Eyes Memory and The Farming of Bones*" (Journey, 2001) According

to Journey, in the male Bildungsroman, one of the main objectives of the male protagonist is to copy his father in many ways to be able to define himself and resume his place in the patriarchal structure. However, Journey believes that in Edwige Danticat's novels, the bond with the mother is the dominant one. Rather than a male protagonist trying to replace his father, we are faced with a young female protagonist who is trying to define her relationship with her mother – rather than copying her. This way, the young girl is able to define her connection with not just the source of her existence but also with all other women around her. The women authors, who write their autobiographies in exile, also write of their coming of age stories and return to the figure of the mother, trying to determine where they stand in the world by relocating the mother in their narrative.

Brodzki touches on a similar point in her article "*Mothers, Displacement, and Language*". She discerns that the autobiographical narratives she mentions in her article are born out of a need to get into a discourse with a non-present and distant mother. (Brodzki, Smith & Watson, 1998) Brodzki believes that the autobiography project symbolizes the attempt to find one's self and core, while in women it also symbolizes the attempt to find their elusive identity alongside the construction of language.

### **Middle Eastern Women Exile Writers: Twice a Rebel**

It is possible to say that women writers are standing up to lives and signifiers assigned to them through choosing autobiography as their medium; using their autobiographic narratives to emphasize their chosen identities. It gives them agency and center stage in joining the discourse about the countries they have lost.

Nawar Al-Hassan Goley states that Arab women writers' writing their autobiographies is an act of rebellion, a writing-against something. They write against the West and they write against the patriarchal culture and the image conceived by the Arabic male "chauvinists". (Al-Hassan Goley, 2003) This attempt and anxiety is present in the autobiographies of Nawal El Saadawi, Hanan Al-Shaykh, Zainab Salbi and Shusha Guppy. The desire to tell their story to the West and the attempt at portraying a realistic

identity presents itself as a rebellion against the Middle Eastern cultures that have put boundaries around them. This eventually pushes them towards gathering the fragments of a broken identity.

Domna C. Stanton's *Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?* article suggests that there is a digression creating conflict in fragmented identities: the writing act itself. In a system and structure that perceives of writing as a phallic pen passed on from father to son, the woman writer situates herself as a person robbing of the male privileges while presenting an opposition the prevalent woman figure. For this reason Stanton believes that women's writing of themselves is a claim to selfhood that turns upside down the status reserved for women. (Stanton, Smith & Watson, 1998)

Mona N. Mikhail points out to how Arabic women refuse to give in to traditional wife and mother role, and thus write about their societies at large, rather than writing only about their wronged sisters. (Mikhail, 1986) Middle Eastern women writers with their autobiographies, not only save their own identities but those of their sisters, mothers, and aunts from dogmatic perspectives.

## **NAWAL EL SAADAWI – WALKING THROUGH FIRE**

### **A WOMAN STANDING NEXT TO THE NILE**

Nawal El Saadawi writes her “Walking Through Fire” autobiography in Arabic and the novel is first published in 1995 in Arabic too. Nawal’s husband of forty years, Sheriff Hetata translates the book to English. By the time this autobiography is published, Nawal is an author renowned all over the world, and has already battled censorship in Egypt with many of her books. Her novel, “Woman at Point Zero” couldn’t even find an editor willing to publish it. Even so, Nawal continued to write her books for her own people and in her mother tongue.

The first paragraph of the autobiography states the nature and reason of Nawal’s unrest. She is in the Duke campus, in a small city called Durham, in North Carolina and seeing the blue of the sky reminds her of her own village. The people in Durham are looking at the sky and thinking it’s “Carolina blue”. (El Saadawi, 1) Nawal is in exile, missing her country and throughout the autobiography she is intent on showing that to her that blue is the blue of Egypt.

After her first biography in which she wrote of her early childhood, when in exile Nawal turns to her first adult years. This is one of the breaking points in her life. When writing the affect of this period on her identity and life, she writes (referring to her first husband); “Between our meeting in November 1951 and our divorce in January 1957, my life was changed more than in all the preceding years of my life.” (El Saadawi, 34) Nawal will go through marriages, divorces, death throughout the autobiography and become a mother herself, lose her mother, will have to leave her country, her dead mother and father behind, leave for exile, almost finish her autobiography in exile and return back to her country.

## **Writing – A Rebellious Act**

The grand negative reactions of the women in Nawal's family and Nawal's first and second husbands, and her second husbands' throwing away Nawal's hand-written novel out the window show how the act of writing can be seen as a rebellious act. When writing about her second husband's aversion to Nawal's authorship, Nawal writes of her novel as if it is an embryo given to him by a different man, and her husband is insisting on her aborting it. (El Saadawi, 173) This is an accurate analogy in a way, as writing saves Nawal from a domesticated fate that is forced on her but it also reminds her of her fertility, making her stronger. Nawal inherits from her father words, books and the desire to write, thus reflecting the idea of her being inseminated by another man with a novel. Nawal can become her father through writing. Before she marries her third husband, Sheriff, she asks him what he thinks about Nawal's interest in literature and writing. She has to ask this, as she believes the culprit for both her divorces is pen and paper. (El Saadawi, 196)

Nawal is always aware of how limiting her native culture can be, and how that culture can restrict women. The situation that arises when one of her professors in college, Doctor Reshad asks for her hand in marriage shows how Nawal feels the pressures of her patriarchal culture. Nawal opposes the idea of marriage and of marrying him because she doesn't love him. The women in her family however implore her to forget about love, to secure her life instead. Referring to this marriage proposal, Nawal also talks about the connotations of a 'divorced women' in Arabic male literature; women who are considered second hand, or 'used' etc. According to Nawal, Abdel Halim Abdallah, Yusuf Al-Siba'i and Nagouib Mahfouz too have described divorced women in this manner. (El Saadawi, 61) This emphasis on the male dominated view can be seen as Nawal's criticism towards the patriarchal intellectuals of her own culture. Middle Eastern literature, which is seen as a male dominated area, provides women with just a narrow space as the world outside literature.

Even the act of choosing to write can be seen as a revolt in a Middle Eastern male dominant culture that can easily be read. Maybe because of this, Nawal states that nothing defeats death quite like writing and asks “Is that why writing was forbidden to women and slaves?” Like gods and prophets, she believes one can lean into life after death through writing. Writing is a shelter for Nawal. Whenever she feels the most restricted and hopeless, she believes that writing becomes life itself. The words on paper represent “a whiff of breath, the silent bleeding to death, the heart ready to love” to her. (El Saadawi, 120) When she is imprisoned and forbidden from having paper and pen, she secretly continues writing a journal, as nothing is more important to her than writing. She believes that “writing requires more courage than killing.” (El Saadawi, 165)

Nawal begins writing this autobiography upon leaving Egypt. Being threatened with death gives her life new meaning, making her life worth living. She writes; “The threat of death seemed to give my life a new importance, made it worth writing about. I felt that the closer I moved towards death, the greater became the value of life. Nothing can defeat death like writing.” (El Saadawi, 3) The forced exile means a defeat to her and the only way for her to struggle against it is by writing. Throughout the autobiography there are various examples of death making life more meaningful for Nawal. Nawal places a skull on her desk and writes that the skull accompanies her, reminding her of death and thus making life more alive.

One of the most pressing themes of Nawal’s autobiography is how writing frees, strengthens and immortalizes the individual. If time exists, Nawal believes that it is something that one creates by writing. (El Saadawi, 6) She says that she does not feel as brave as her friend who died without writing a single page. Writing is rebelling, it is forbidden to women and it is a way of identifying with her mother and father. Nevertheless, Nawal believes dying without writing is a braver deed. Nawal however does not want to think of herself apart from what writing has saved for her. By writing, she can bring back her memories of her beloved city Cairo; otherwise her experiences don’t feel like they exist. Nawal’s motivation in writing her autobiography stands here,

her being away from a country she passionately loves threatens the livelihood of her memories. She makes her memories, and thus her life re-surface through writing.

This is why she keeps returning to the act of writing throughout her autobiography. After writing that her name has been added to a death list, and the ways in which she found ways to escape the bodyguard provided to her, she returns to the topic of writing. Whenever she writes about times when she feels fragile and helpless, Nawal talks about writing again. Because writing is her sole refuge, no other thing replaces or compensates for the words she writes. It could be said that Nawal fears getting lost once exiled from her motherland, mother tongue and hometown. Writing is a guarantee of her existence. To Nawal, words are everything she owns, and they own her. To her, “writing has been the antithesis of death and yet, paradoxically, the reason why –she- was put in a death-list.” (El Saadawi, 16)

### **Women’s Solidarity**

Aside from Nawal’s struggles against the pressures and prejudices of sexist men, there are passages in the autobiography where she praises traditional women. She writes about women who never have the opportunity to get an education in the village, who for this reason never have the chance to leave their traditional lives. Nawal is in awe of these women. Nawal demands to go to her village in a congress, to help people the people in her village and leave Cairo that is suffocating her. One of the doctors in the congress objects to this demand, saying that someone who belongs to the fair sex would not be able to handle being a doctor in the village. This angers Nawal and she goes on to tell this man that she hails from Kafr Tahla village, that the women in her village wake up before the break of dawn, hoe the fields, work under the scorching sun or morning dew, come back home once the day is over, cook food, clean, bake bread, only eat after everyone else has eaten, walk barefoot on roads, walk even farther than men. She then proceeds to ask, “Are not these women members of what you call “the fair sex”?” (El Saadawi, 77) Women in the village are subject to Nawal’s admiration even when they don’t rebel

against norms of patriarchal culture. Nawal is aware of how these women are exposed to a different type of struggle when living within traditional roles.

Once Nawal leaves for her village with her daughter, a middle-aged woman knocks on her door. This is a relative of her grandmother, her children have left, her husband deserted her, and she has no one left. She tells Nawal that if she takes him in, she will serve her. Nawal names her 'Dada Om Ibrahim' and upon this naming ceremony, the woman becomes responsible for everything from the home keys, to the upkeep of the house, cleaning, food, and taking care of Nawal's daughter. Nawal doesn't even see any problem handing Dada Om Ibrahim her secret diary. Nawal teaches her to read and write, gives her a watch and helps her write down the appointments of the clinic. Dada Om Ibrahim keeps on resurfacing as a safe harbor whenever Nawal feels threatened and on a tight rope. By teaching her to read and write, and handing the woman her secret diary, Nawal is able to give power to this helpless and homeless woman.

### **A Women Rebelling Against Patriarchy**

In her article *Biography as History* included in her book, "Autobiography and the Construction of Identity and Community in the Middle East" Judith E. Tucker talks about how Arabic biographers emphasize character. According to Tucker, this emphasis is not an overt one, rather done through anecdotes that help give an idea about character. The relationships one has with her contemporaries and the reactions one gives to situations she faces, gives the reader information towards the character of the protagonist. Even if an outright analysis about the character isn't on the paper, the author paints a big enough picture for the reader to ascertain the specifics of the protagonists' character. (Tucker, 11)

As she praises the women of her culture and country, Nawal nonetheless makes sure that the reader sees how Nawal is also different from her women contemporaries, in terms of her choices and attitudes. She writes that most of the time she was the only woman in the political rallies and meetings. (El Saadawi, 30) Nawal's professor Doctor Reshad usually holds competitions for diagnosing patients, and according to Nawal no female student

ever participated in these competitions. How could a virgin girl push through all the male bodies in order to listen to a heart palpitations of a patient, after all? Whilst Doctor Reshad makes fun of the girls left behind in the room, calling them pretty vases, asking them why they are silent. He singles out Nawal any time she makes fun of the girls, never acting condescending towards her. Nawal writes that she doesn't know why she was not subjected to the same attitude, that maybe it was because she looked straight at Doctor Reshad in these instances with an angry glare. She hates the word vase, it reminds her of the word, slave. (El Saadawi, 59) Even though Nawal doesn't write it outright, the reader can ascertain why Doctor Reshad singles out Nawal from this attitude. As can be seen from this anecdote, Nawal is a rebellious woman, and throughout the story she makes sure that the narrative reveals her opponent character.

Medicine, like literature, helps bring Nawal far away from traditional women roles. Although she eventually chooses literature and writing as her profession, she continuously mentions how medicine saves her from the throes of patriarchal roles allocated to women in her culture. After having her first surgical operation, her patient wakes up from the anesthesia, and his first word is "ah". This *ah* is sweeter to Nawal than the first mutterings of love. When writing about the same incident – as she's writing her autobiography – she says that forty years have passed, but she still remembers the smile of her patient that night, and that she has never seen a smile more pretty. (El Saadawi, 83) When writing about how her patient healed, and the happiness she got from her successful surgical operations, she uses words and codes that are usually reserved for talking about romantic relationships. This can be seen as her attempt to situate herself apart from the girls and women around her. Nawal finds joy not in romantic love letters but in saving sick patients in her village.

Medicine helps Nawal acquire a career and know-how outside of the home but also with her salary, it allows her an economic freedom. Nawal victoriously writes about her first divorce when she holds the papers in her hand. She likens this memory to when she gets her university diploma or when she receives her first salary. Divorce is her savior. To put it in other words, divorce is a victory to Nawal rather than a defeat. She is a doctor of

medicine and does not need a husband to take care of her. Furthermore, through her divorce, she has become an individual who is neither a woman nor a man. (El Saadawi, 63) On top of the freedom divorced women have compared to single women, the economic freedom provided by Nawal's career and salary have made her an anomaly. Thus, patriarchy does not have as strong a pull on Nawal as it does on single, married or not-working women. Being an anomaly, and the freedom resulting from this resurfaces multiple times throughout the autobiography.

Nawal writes about her second divorce the same way she writes about her first divorce, in a victorious manner. When Nawal asks for the divorce, her second husband refuses and tells her he will remain married to her even if Nawal doesn't want the marriage that the law is on the side of the husband. Nawal remembers her scalpel in her surgical kit, looks her husband straight in the eye, taking out the scalpel walks towards him, telling him she does not recognize him, that she is refusing him. Her husband abides. She defeats the patriarchal laws and traditions by the identity she has acquired through hard work. (El Saadawi, 192)

As medicine provides Nawal another opportunity outside of the traditional boundaries of a male-dominated culture, it also re-births patriarchal structures within itself. Nawal, nevertheless persists, opening up new spaces to her. When she's in medical school, Nawal sees that the sons of professors always get the best grades and likens the Kingdom of Medicine to the Kingdom of Egypt; thrones pass from father to son. Nawal on the other hand always works on her classes, never misses a class of lab work, and thus she is always praised by her professors and instructors. When talking about how hardworking and focused she is, she underlines how she turns expectations of women upside down and says;

“I wasted no time, heading straight for what I wanted, never dawdled in the courtyard to talk to a colleague or one of the staff, went in and out of school like an arrow, looked straight in people's faces and did not sway on high-heeled shoes.” (El Saadawi, 56)

Nawal seems to care about the times she receives praise and applause from various groups of men. The frequency of these passages underline the success Nawal has in areas that are not traditionally populated by women. She struggles much more than her male counterparts because she is a woman, working to gain praise, but in the end she is able gain acceptance from father figures who have monopolized these spaces. The acceptance she receives from male figures very frequently throughout. She writes proudly about the time when as a doctor of medicine she goes to her village to help people in her village, the village people welcome her with applause. (El Saadawi, 73) After saving the life of her first surgical patient in the village, Nawal writes she became a topic of discussion in male cafes in the village. These discussions contain respect and are thus important for Nawal because they show that she was able to have the identity she meticulously crafted, accepted by others.

A similar example takes place in the commemorative ceremony that takes place for Ahmed Al-Menessi, who has fallen martyr fighting with the British. Nawal has been asked to make a speech at the ceremony. She gets on the stage, ready to make her speech and after a brief moment starts to speak. She is followed by a leader of the Muslim Brothers, who is supposed to be one of the best speakers in the faculty. Regardless, once he gets on stage he looks at the students and says “Brothers, after listening to our colleague Nawal El Saadawi I have nothing to say.” (El Saadawi, 44) Once the speeches are over, some friends gather by Nawal and congratulate him saying how great her speech was. Hers was the best speech, even the best speaker of the faculty was unable to say anything else after her! Nawal feels she is ascending under the eyes of people who are looking at her admirably, she has almost suddenly become Ahmed El-Menessi. Because Nawal has always felt bad about not being able to take part in the armed struggle, she feels better about being thought of as similar to a person who has fallen martyr. She has tamed her desire to become a hero through speaking – through writing her speech, with her pen. She has acquired an identity that has been refused to her, through her own attempts and methods. Whenever she receives such praise in the autobiography, she proves that she regains the identity she desires. Nawal is neither a

nurse nor a dancer, neither is she a male figure who holds power in her hands, but she has found a way to exist with an identity she chose herself.

After the speech at the ceremony, Nawal receives a letter from one of the students. In the letter, she reads; “Before I heard you speak at the mourning of the martyr Al-Menessi I believed in Allah, my country and myself. Now I believe in Allah, my country, you and myself.” (El Saadawi, 47) Although she harbors no romantic feelings towards the student who gives her the letter, it makes her terribly proud so she brings about the letter to her father straight away. She thinks, “Here was a human being whose faith in me was only slightly less than his faith in God and in his country.” (El Saadawi, 47) It is almost like she has promoted to a higher place, a place a little behind God and country. In order to share this pride, she chooses not her mother but rather her father and this is important. Her mother is a figure within the confines of the house, a figure she holds praise for domestic matters. She chooses her father to share her pride, as her father is seen as a member of the political, social and artsy world outside. His approval counts. Success is only real when she gets approval from her father.

### **Father: An Image of the Street and Success**

The importance of Nawal’s relationship with her father in terms of her family and her character makes itself known throughout. The affect of this relationship can best be seen in the symbolic objects in her career in literature. Whenever Nawal speaks of her successes and hard work, she mentions her father. When writing about the time she was interested in literature in college, she writes that she inherited her father’s dreams of literature. (El Saadawi, 28) When she first receives a room of her own, she writes that she has a desk. The desk is bought for her by her father.

Nawal finds herself in a much stronger position than women in her culture after her first divorce. When talking about this strong position, she mentions again her father and his affect on her. Finally, she has become a person her father would praise, and it is thanks to her that she has become this person.

“Now I was independent, could provide for myself, no longer needed money from my father, no longer had to obey him, even though he never made me feel that he expected obedience in return for my keep. Throughout his life he taught me self-respect, taught me to argue with him, tell him what I thought, discuss my feelings even about the existence of the God in whom he believed.” (El Saadawi, 62-63)

Nawal frequently integrates stories that reveal the farsightedness and intelligence of her father; repeatedly speaking of her father’s intellect when it comes to political matters. Upon hearing about Muhammad Naguib's revolution on the radio, Nawal’s father takes a look at the photo on the newspaper, and pointing to Gamal Abd Al-Nasser he saying he is the real leader of the revolution. Nawal emphasizes how his father is able to discern this when no one else is aware of Al-Nasser’s rise. She asks his father how he is able to tell this; to which her father replies that he can see it in his eyes. Nawal writes that years later she was able to meet Al-Nasser and that in this man’s length, and stoop shoulders she saw her grandmother and father. According to Nawal, just like Nawal’s father, Al-Nasser is a man who has not become overcome with the burden he has had to carry.

After her father’s death, Nawal writes that her eight siblings got together and decided that Nawal be their guardian. Nawal’s father had already told Nawal before his death that, “I know I have no reason to worry as long as you are with them.” (El Saadawi, 138) Nawal’s father’s pension will not have been enough for all Nawal’s siblings, many of whom were still attending school. Nawal has to look after her siblings and her daughter from her first marriage. Nawal takes on this load, which usually falls on the oldest son of the family. That Nawal mentions this burden right after talking about her father and Al-Nasser’s similarity, that they did not crush under pressure works to show that she is also drawing a similarity between herself and these two men she deems important and successful. Just like them, Nawal never thinks off falling apart under pressure. Sometimes she thinks that her hair got white so early in life because of the load she has had to carry. Other times, she sees her prematurely white hair something that she inherited from her father. The responsibilities she undertakes liken her to her father (and

Al-Nasser in this example), pushing her out of a space that is presumed to be distinctly female.

Nawal believes that with the death of her father, the distance that existed between them all through her life, suddenly vanishes. She has always known and felt that she and her father are of different genders and this has caused some sort of unspeakable distance to always loom between them. However, Nawal writes that when her father died, the pain of his death entered her body. The pain that enters Nawal's body allows for the distance between them to be sedated, her father's dead body becomes a part of Nawal's in a way. (El Saadawi, 144) Nawal's father's death, the rupture and pain caused by this death causes Nawal to become her father in a psychoanalytic manner.

Nawal's aunt Nimet finds Nawal in the corridor after Nawal announces that she does not want to get married to Doctor Reshad. Nimet tells Nawal that she is fortunate that someone wants marry her despite her divorce and daughter. Nawal senses that Nimet utters the word "daughter" with a sadness she has carried with herself since she was born. This throws her into thinking of her own birth, hypothesizing that when she was born as a girl a silence pierced the entire universe, silencing the congratulatory sounds of women that follow the birth of a boy. Nawal feels that her birth was a cause for sadness rather than a celebration for her family. She writes that all through her childhood she has been thinking of how she could transform this grief to gladness. Nawal finds happiness is tied to her academic achievements and literature but both these spaces are allocated to men. Nawal feels that spaces allocated to women include toilets, corridors and kitchens that need to be cleaned. She notes that her family is most happy when a prospective groom comes into the picture. Nawal writes about how she used to contemplate how she could change the minds of her parents, how could she make sure that they be proud of her achievements as a doctor and a writer? (El Saadawi, 65)

Perhaps this is why although she has been earning money from medicine, one day when one of her stories is sold to a literary magazine and she earns three pounds, she heads straight to her father and gives him the money. Like always, until her father approves of

the success, it does not count. Her father, after congratulating her returns to the topic of her possible clinic in Giza. He tells her that he is excited about when she will be opening the clinic. When she tells her father that what she really wants in life is to work with literature rather than medicine, her father warns her that writers in Egypt either die of starvation or end up in prison, a clinic sounds like a safer option. (El Saadawi, 123) Nawal eventually opens the clinic and after losing her father, almost as if fulfilling his prophecy, she ends up in prison because of the things she writes.

### **Mother: A Starting Point**

Nawal never has the opportunity to do a surgical operation in her medical education but once she goes to her village with her daughter, one night an urgent patient comes to the clinic. Nawal realizes that the boy's family looks at Nawal like a god who has the ability to cure all sicknesses. Even though she's not sure she can handle it, she gets into action and successfully takes out the appendicitis of the patient. Throughout this operation Nawal writes it was her mother's voice that kept her company, when she said; "You can throw Nawal into the fire and she will come out unscathed. No one in the world is cleverer than she is." giving her confidence and life. (El Saadawi, 82) Her autobiographical novel's name is derived from her mother's quote about fires. The mirror Nawal finds in the eyes of her mother is a force that provides Nawal with her desired identity.

When writing about the birth of her daughter, Nawal breaks free from the identification with the father, instead turning towards her mother. Through having a daughter of her own, Nawal is able to redefine her relationship with her mother. She starts drawing parallels between her own infancy and that of her daughter, between her own motherhood and that of her mother. She writes; "My mind, my body and my spirit fused into a solid, strong being called a mother. In this mother's arms lay the new-born child." when writing about this transformatory experience that has such an affect on the construction of her identity. (El Saadawi, 67)

Whenever Nawal writes about herself through the eyes of her daughter Nawal, the parallels between Nawal and her mother resurface. When Nawal is returning to her village with her daughter in tow, she walks fast and sings her daughter a song. Her daughter in turn sways her head to the rhythm of the song, just like Nawal used to sway her head to the songs of her mother. (El Saadawi, 72) This is how Nawal completes the circle; Nawal is both the baby and the mother, looking at the mother who took care of her, who is now taking care of the daughter looking up at her.

When Nawal writes of the sadness she experienced with the death of her mother, she likens the pain to nothing else she ever experienced. Her mother is an unfinished possibility, and Nawal explores this by saying that although her mother dreamed of playing the piano, going around the world in planes and exploring, she never had the opportunity to do any of those because she got married at fifteen and died at forty-five without fulfilling any of her dreams. (El Saadawi, 125) Unlike her mother, Nawal takes immense risks to make sure her dreams are realized and overcomes the obstacles and threats she encounters while doing so by remembering the way her mother saw her as fierce, capable and brave.

### **Mother of a Daughter**

Although Nawal sees that her parents are joyed about her successes at medical school, she realizes that this happiness is short-lived. As soon as Nawal fails to do something they want, or give birth to a girl rather than a boy, this happiness vanishes. (El Saadawi, 66) Nawal on the other hand, dreams of the day she will give birth to a baby girl for on that day she will show the world how a girl should be welcomed into the world. She writes about how she dreamt of screaming to the world that she had a girl. And that is exactly what she does once she has a daughter. Nawal is traumatized because she feels that her family experienced a disappointment with her birth. She compensates for the times her parents withheld their praise and approval for the successes she had by joyously welcoming her daughter into the world. Giving birth to a daughter is perhaps so joyous because of this. Once she has a baby girl, she feels she can stand up to everyone, make

the world change so that when a girl is born, people are as or more excited than when a boy is born. With the birth of her daughter, she is able to right the wrongs of her family, and by giving her daughter the things she lacked, she can make up for her own parents' lacks.

Nawal writes about how her daughter never forgot her birthday while Nawal was in exile and that with every phone call from her daughter she was wrapped with a motherly warmth, bringing her back to her homeland. (El Saadawi, 69) Exile isolates Nawal and thus making her feel like she's losing her own motherhood; in most of the stories about exile in the autobiography, Nawal mentions her daughter Mona acting motherly towards her. Mona embraces her in a motherly fashion, calls her on her birthday and thus through her daughter calling her back to motherhood Nawal is able to reach a place where she can reconnect with her country and re-experience the warmth of motherhood.

Nawal writes with pride when she's talking about Mona becoming an author when she grows up; this way the reader understands that in Mona Nawal sees her own reflection. When writing about her daughter's authorship, Nawal says; "Her fingers look like mine as they curl around her pen. Her letters are bold, engraved on the moon, and her name printed on the page makes my hear beat so strongly." (El Saadawi, 68) By allowing her daughter the freedom she has always wished for herself, by being interested in her daughter's endeavors in literature rather than her marriage, through their similarities and the confidence she provides her daughter, Nawal is able to heal her own wounds, and make peace with the shortcomings of her own parents.

### **A Limbo Between Home and the Street**

Nawal begins her autobiography in her home in exile. The novel ends when Nawal returns to Egypt. She writes in detail about her plane trip back home and the pleasant conversation she has with a stranger on the plane. The reader senses a sort of tension building up between Nawal and the stranger. The stranger, who is as interested in international politics as Nawal, tells her that he would like to come to Egypt with her, but

Nawal refuses this offer. The autobiography finishes just when Nawal lands in Egypt, ready to welcome her. Somewhere in the back of her mind is the stranger she met on the plane but going back to her loved ones means going back home.

Stanton in also mentions in her article *Autogynography: Is the Subject Different that in women autobiographies*, that there is a constant tension between her traditional roles as mother, daughter, and wife and the un-traditional ambition. (Stanton, Smith & Watson, 1998) Nawal El Saadawi, throughout her autobiography makes sure to underline this tension between the home and the outside world. Suffocated by the political and social atmosphere of Egypt, Nawal leaves her children with her husband and goes to the Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. When writing about that time, Nawal admits that she missed her children and her home, but also didn't want to leave Jordan.

### **Political Awakening and Stance**

A goddess finds itself into Nawal's narrative throughout the autobiography. This is an ancient figure encompassing qualities Nawal deems important in and special to women like being skillful and persevering. Once she is back in her village, reaches the age of 25, is divorced and working as a doctor, she has never asked how the ancient goddess who was thought to have the ability to give life to the dead became a witch eating children. This marks a period of political and social awakening for Nawal, forcing her into action towards her goals and beliefs.

However, even before going to the village, one can discern that Nawal's political awakening begins to take root in her pupilage in medical school. In parallel, Nawal's hometown is going through political transformations as well. Nawal wants to play an active role in this transformation but because she is a women, she is angry to find out that the roles open to her are very limited. Her future husband Ahmed goes on a conquest as a freedom fighter and Nawal not only fears his loss but also feels frustrated at not being able to join in the struggle like him. Nawal discerns that women are expected only to join in the fight as nurses, or as entertainers of men. Both these professions sound

condescending to Nawal, as she has never dreamt of herself in the costumes of either professions but rather in military uniform. She loves her country, she is ready to give her life for her country even but she is not allowed to join Ahmed in the struggle. Her self-respect is more important to her even than her life. (El Saadawi, 39)

Still, war zones lure her in. She wants to be a hero, because only when she is a hero can she show everyone what she's made of, everything she is able to do and achieve. (El Saadawi, 39) This comes as no surprise for even though she is never active on the battlefield, her whole life is situated like a struggle towards patriarchy. Nawal has found a way to fight, to challenge people without losing her self-confidence, and using nothing but her pen.

Nawal's activist identity is apparent in her desire to better the lives of her countrymen and countrywomen as well as the conditions in her own country. Not only does she take care of patients in the village but every Thursday she visits private homes of the village people with her nurses, giving lectures about health. When she starts talking about the dangers of female circumcision, *dayas* and village barbers who perform these operations feel threatened and try to incite the village people towards her. Nawal feels her efforts may be in vain but does not give up. (El Saadawi, 88) When the village people tell her about stories of devils walking along the village at night, Nawal roams the paths of the village at night, by herself. The girl who was afraid of the dark has long gone, as Nawal has become a twenty-six year old doctor roaming the paths, drawing circles in the night, fighting supernatural creatures and ignorance. (El Saadawi, 103)

### **City – The Mother and the Child**

Nawal sees her country as a place where men and women don't have the freedom to meet comfortably, such meetings are thought to be the dealings of devil. However Cairo, Nawal's own city, means that which is victorious and to Nawal Cairo is a broken place. To Nawal, Cairo is the city to be hated and loved, the city she longs to return to every

time she leaves, and wishes to leave every time she returns. It incites feelings of compassion and hatred, a place she longs to run away from and reunite with.

With her mother's death, Cairo too comes to an end for Nawal. She writes in her secret diary that with her mother's death, Cairo too has died in her and asks; "How can a woman become a whole city? Is it the first time this has happened in history?" (El Saadawi, 127)

### **The Mother's Distance to a Native and Foreign Language**

Arabic to Nawal el Saadawi, is a language that has not been created for her. She does not believe that it speaks to her. To Nawal, Arabic is made for men, and it is adorned with divine words and idioms that rob Nawal of her existence. (El Saadawi, 145) After writing about her second marriage to a man she did not love, and with whom she felt like a prisoner, Nawal returns to writing of exile. She writes that she feels like she has not written anything, the words on the paper do not belong to her, she's been told that this is her mother tongue but the language she acquired, she has not heard from her mother. When writing about her confusion she says; "They are the words of a language that belongs to a man unknown to me, a man who dies years before I was born." (El Saadawi, 148)

Furthermore, the patriarchal language has spread as the dominant language and Nawal sees traces of this language even in women around her. When the paper-pushers in Nawal's village make her job difficult, Dada Om Ibrahim says the petty bureaucrat Khairallah should go and join the war effort instead of hiding like a woman in the village. Nawal is very troubled with the word woman in this sentence. She chides Om Ibrahim asking her how she can use woman like a derivative word when she herself is a woman. In return, Om Ibrahim says she has gotten used to the bad language of the village, that there are women who are twenty times more capable at doing what Khairallah is doing, and that she doesn't know why she said such a thing. (El Saadawi, 91) Nawal's inclusion

of this story in her autobiography can be seen as part of her quest to find a language that includes and incorporates all women.

After returning to the city, Nawal writes she took a walk along the Nile one day to come across a political rally against British colonizers. There are protestors carrying the photo of Abd Al-Nasser, who are chanting against the Queen of England. Upon hearing the chants that state that they no longer want to be ruled by a woman, Nawal freezes, feeling humiliated. She no longer feels confident as the doctor treating them, she no longer feels like a freedom fighter standing side by side with them, she feels like just a woman. She has been transformed into “a word shooting out from the mouths of the boys like a gob of spit.” (El Saadawi, 95) She has tried to prove herself, tried to become victorious, tried to be beneficial to her country but her country dismissed her with the language it decided to use, making all her accomplishments disappear. She likens the disappointment she feels towards her country to the disappointment she felt towards her parents when they were more interested in her marriages than her accomplishments in medicine and literature. Her country, just like her parents, sees her as an incapable woman, rather than a doctor or a fighter. Nawal’s repeated attempts at returning to her country can be seen as a way to break free from this condescending attitude and get the approval of her country – and by extension from her deceased parents – and to crosscheck her identity with this approval.

Nawal’s critical attitude towards Britain’s colonizing attitude as well as the wounds present in Nawal, caused by the colonizing forces is always apparent throughout the autobiography. Nawal writes that the language of education in her school is English. She takes the classes in English, her readings and books are also in this language, she points out that the sicknesses and heart palpitations are explained in English. (El Saadawi, 58) Nawal, however prefers to always write her novels and books in Arabic.

### **Returning East**

After Nawal refuses the marriage proposal of Doctor Reshat and Doctor Reshat rises high above the ranks in the government, he mentions Nawal in an interview. According to

Doctor Reshat, Nawal is trying to please the West through her writings. (El Saadawi, 176) Men who are afraid of the demise of patriarchal cultures use this tactic frequently against women who refuse to obey the rules of said cultures. However, being accused of trying to please the West, whose oppression so deeply hurt Nawal and her country, feels personal to Nawal and is probably the reason why she mentions this job in her narrative. Similarly, whenever Nawal does or says something defending the rights of women, she is accused with going against the divine rules of Islam. When she's working in the village, she harbors in her clinic a young girl who was forced to marry an old man who rapes her daily, and swiftly a report is written about her, urging the authorities to do something about this doctor woman. (El Saadawi, 112)

### **Looking at the West**

Nawal was a university student when Egypt is a British colony and a rebellious streak towards the colonial order is present in the autobiography throughout. Furthermore, it is possible to come across the frustration and anger present in colonized peoples and individuals in Nawal's writing.

Nawal remembers a day in school, as sentiments against colonization are on the rise in Egypt, that a student asks the British teacher why the British are still in Egypt. The professor goes to the door, looks at the students and says "We are here because you are cowards." Nawal imagines this words cowards like spit coming out of the mouth of the professor and feels no student in that classroom was exempt from the humiliation rising from that spit. What angers her most is that she too is humiliated by it and that she has done nothing about this. When explaining the reason for her frustration she writes; "It would remain stuck to my face, no matter how many times I washed it with soap and water." (El Saadawi, 41)

## **Fragmented Narration**

Stanton maintains that in autobiographies, fragmented narrative sequences and competing foci points are frequently present. (Stanton, Smith & Watson, 1998) A similar trend can be found in Nawal's autobiography as well. Nawal follows a thematic pattern rather than a chronological one when writing her autobiography. When writing about the time she put her fist into glass, she writes that she had to walk around with bandage for a while after the surgery. Then she goes on to write about the time when she was married to a man she didn't love, carrying his child she didn't want to carry so she jumped off the balcony to have a miscarriage. She writes about how she again had to walk around with a bandage around her arm. The stories are not connected through temporal relations but rather an attempt at making a case for her story. Both times show a desperation in Nawal, and both times show a desire to break free. By breaking her arm and hand, she is able to get what she wants, or to at least continue to strive to do it.

## **Exile**

In an interview given to Helena Frith Powell, Nawal el Saadawi states that rather than dying of cancer in America or Norway, she would rather be shot and die in the streets of Cairo because of her ideology. That way, if she dies in Cairo, her death would mean something. (Powell, 2013) Life, again finds its meaning towards its nemesis, death, in Nawal's ideology and writing. Nawal believes that the death sentence given to Nawal by the despots in her country makes her life even more meaningful.

When Nawal leaves Cairo for her village, it is told in great contrast to how exile makes her feel. She leaves Cairo by her own will, after the birth of her daughter. She remembers her own childhood, feels suffocated in Cairo and believes that being in her village will help her find meaning. When explaining her enthusiasm, she writes "My stride on the earth was powerful, big like my village grandmother. I needed space, yearned for the smell of green fields, of mud ovens baking bread." (El Saadawi, 70) When describing this

journey, she emphasizes how powerful she felt to be retuning as a doctor to a village that she had left as a small child.

When writing about her return to the village with her daughter, Nawal paints a triumphant and joyous scene. Train stations make her happy, she feels within herself a desire to meet many people, to challenge the world, to keep on going. Unlike the experience of exile, leaving Cairo for the village is Nawal's own choice, hence it empowers her, rather than making her feel lonely. Going to the village is her choice, it is even against the wishes of the patriarchal society that does not believe she has what it takes to make it there. It makes her feel invincible. Exile is about loss and deprivation but leaving Cairo for the village embodies a certain capableness.

### **Mirrors and First Person Singular**

Nawal goes on to use third person singular in the autobiography whenever she writes of a time when she was not proud of herself. In almost all these transitions, she's looking at herself in a mirror, in an almost dream-like state. Jale Parla, in her article *My History is My Nightmare! Dream, Nightmare, Room and Writing in Women Novelist* (original: *Tarihçem Kabusumdur! Kadın Romancılarında Rüya, Kabus, Oda, Yazı*) writes, "I believe history, in all our women writers' narratives, appears as a nightmare from which they can't wake up."<sup>3</sup> (Parla, 2014) In Nawal's autobiography, whenever she uses third person singular, looking at the mirror, the narrative takes on a dream-like feel, sometimes it is outright a dream itself. All these sequences mark periods in life where Nawal might have felt defeated by the culture she was raised in.

The first of these transitions happens on the first page. Nawal begins her narrative with first person singular, writing "I get out of bed slowly, afraid of waking up from the dream, creep over to the mirror" and then she converts to third person singular; "There she is, standing tall, her shoulders slightly bent, her skin brown like the silt brought down

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<sup>3</sup> "Bütün kadın yazarlarımızın anlatılarında, bence tarih, uyanamadıkları bir kabus olarak belirir."

by the Nile, her hair snow white, thick, tossing around her head, her nightgown of white cotton crumpled with a pattern of small flowers scattered over it.” (El Saadawi, 1) This is a woman who has feet like her grandmother, when her husband Sheriff calls out to her saying, ‘Sabah El Kheir Nawal’<sup>4</sup> her memory returns so she responds back to her husband with ‘Sabah El Kheir’. When her name is added to a death list in Egypt she had to walk around with a bodyguard and had to leave her country when she had the opportunity. She appears to enjoy her lessons, her habitat and the subject she teaches. “Yet, exile means exile, and there is nothing she can do to change it.” (El Saadawi, 2) And with that sentence, the narrative switches back to first person singular. Again, it might be said that she’s employing third person singular when writing about exile as it humiliates her to have given in to people who wanted her to be gone. Nawal gets defensive when writing about her decision to go into exile. In the same chapter she writes that she escaped Egypt five years ago and “It was the need to escape death, the legitimate desire to defend my life.” (El Saadawi, 9)

Another example of this transition can be seen when she’s looking at the mirror again, this time married to a husband she doesn’t love, pregnant with a baby she doesn’t want. She writes in third person singular, “This woman has married a man she does not love, practices a profession that was not made for her, carries a child in her belly which is not hers, lives in a house belonging to someone else, leaving it every morning reluctantly to work in a smelly hospital she hates. This woman – how can she be me?” (El Saadawi, 177) When writing about the daily routine she had with that husband she writes again in third person singular. The woman and the husband work all day outside, than come back home, stuck between the walls, the tragedy re-starts each time as she contemplates escaping and asks herself why she’s still there. Remaining in that marriage to Nawal was a sort of defeat, and thus to distance herself from that woman, whose weakness is fortified, she does not use first person singular. Only when writing about how embarrassed she felt about being seen in public with this husband, and making fun of his physical characteristics does she return to first person singular. (El Saadawi, 187) Ridiculing the husband, and choosing not to be associated with him in public contain an

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<sup>4</sup> In Arabic: Good Morning

element of struggle within and thus she does not feel humiliated anymore when writing about it.

When writing about her first husband, who got to be addicted to drugs and who got violent towards Nawal, choking her, Nawal swiftly changes into third person singular.

“When he looked around all he could see now was the women he loved. Her neck was there to strangle, even though she had given him love. So after he had torn up her photographs and papers and thrown them in the dustbin, he turned on her with all his pent-up fury, with all the madness of the drug. But the drug had made him weak and she was strong. She left him panting on the bed weeping like a child. Now she knew she had to go. She mover towards the door but before she left the room, she put her coat on over her night-gown, an as she looked down at her bare feet, there on the floor was her Medical Association card with her photograph partly torn off. She bent down with trembling fingers, picked it up and put it in the pocket of her coat.” (El Saadawi, 181)

The moment Nawal chooses to leave, the narrative changes to first person singular again. Nawal cuddles her daughter, leaves the house and runs into the house of her father who is waiting for her. Whenever there is a struggle and whenever Nawal is challenging the hardships she’s faced with, the narration returns to first person singular.

Nawal returns to third person singular when she’s talking about her first love. The love that she felt while spending her time on medicine and literature, while contemplating taking up arms, saving her country, fighting the enemy. Her heart beats like it hasn’t beaten since she’d been a teenager. She briefly describes the feelings of that girl in love in third person singular; “The child had become a girl of twenty, a student who took her studies seriously, followed courses in anatomy, biochemistry, physiology and pathology.” (El Saadawi, 29) This feeling of love that she finds overtly feminine, incompatible with her dreams, this almost domesticated and traditional excitement causes Nawal to write in third person singular again. Whenever the narrative touches on a period of time where Nawal wasn’t proud of herself or her actions, throughout the autobiography, this third person narrative resurfaces.

Thus autobiography becomes an attempt at accepting the person she sees when she looks at the mirror. It signifies a journey to accept the reflection in the mirror without turning to the aid of third person singular's alienation. Whenever she behaves in accordance with the societal expectations rather than her personal beliefs, third person singular narration pops up, emphasizing her remorse and guilt. Whenever Nawal approves of her actions and attitudes, the narration switches back to first person singular again. Eventually, Nawal's story is not the story of patriarchal systems that belittle and restrict women's lives and dreams but rather the victory of a woman who goes against these systems.

### **Womanhood, Appearance, Sexuality**

Appearing womanly and feminine is implied as a weakness throughout the autobiography by Nawal. She repeatedly writes that she does not like visual ornaments. Especially when writing about her college year self, she writes that she stayed away from sparkly clothes and shoes. She believes in the beauty chaos brings, that ugliness is an integral part of beauty and for this reason shies away from painting her nails and face. When describing her attitude then, she writes; "My body was mine and I did not need to exhibit it to people's eyes." (El Saadawi, 27) At the same time, she is aware of the womanliness struggling to break free inside of her.

Despite her hesitation at being perceived as feminine or womanly, Nawal never stays away from writing about sexuality. When her fiancé returns from armed opposition, and tells Nawal that the Egyptian government is trying to put freedom fighters in prison, Nawal senses that a completely different man is standing before her. She no longer feels the excitement she used to feel when they were shaking hands. Once they get married and share the same bed, Nawal laments the fact that her body doesn't tremble like it used to when they shook hands. Sex, to her and at that time, seems very much like a disappointment like the fight for freedom. (El Saadawi, 52)

Nawal writes about her mother and father's relationship as well, touching on the sense of conservatism that was present there. She writes that it took her mother five children to finally be able to call her husband by her first name. Even after nine kids, Nawal's mother had never gotten naked in front of her husband. (El Saadawi, 71) Remembering all this, Nawal smiles as she rides on the train, on the way to the village. This smile signifies her recognition that although there are many commonalities, and she returns to her mother for support and mirroring, she is different from her mother. She is divorced, on her own with her daughter and on the road to realize her dreams.

Nawal has been able to go into spaces and places that had typically been reserved for men, and has proven successful in both medicine and literature, even in her political life that was cut short by exile. Her autobiography not only touches on all her successes but also on the approval she got from her father, and various other father figures. Regardless, it is her mother's gaze and point of view that gives Nawal strength whenever she feels most vulnerable, making it possible for her to continue moving forward. For this reason, her book is titled after her mother's conviction that Nawal can walk through fires unscathed. If her mother believes that Nawal can walk through a fire, than walk through a fire Nawal will.

## **ZAINAB SALBI – Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the Shadow of Saddam**

### **BIRDS OVERTHROW THEIR CAGES**

Zainab Salbi, wrote her autobiography in 2005 with Laurie Becklund. The book is published in English and when Zainab is living in the United States. The autobiography focuses on the forced friendship Zainab's parents had to form with Saddam, and the years they spend under his pressure. When Zainab is eleven, her father becomes Saddam's private pilot and with this development her family finds itself in a symbolic prison. Zainab leaves for America because of an arranged marriage when she is 19 and is raped by her husband. She immediately leaves him, and creates a life for herself. After getting married for the second time and enrolling in college, at 23 she founds an organization aimed at helping women victims of war. After her mother is diagnosed with ALS, and after the revelations Zainab has with her mother about their past, after Saddam is caught and prisoned, Zainab decides to write her autobiography. With the onset of the Arab Spring, inspired and excited, she steps down as director of the foundation and decides to go back to the Middle East.

### **Writing – A Rebellious Act**

Writing signifies an important refraction for Zainab Salbi. Through the foundation she builds in exile, Zainab works with women victims of war, urging them to break their silences, to talk about their traumatic experiences in an effort to ensure that the bullies who hurt them be punished. However, she realizes that she is unable to break her silence herself, she's making speeches everywhere, even on TV, in a way hiding in plain sight but unable to utter the words; "Saddam Hussein on my front porch." (Salbi, Loc152) She hides herself in the traumas of women victims, providing them with a safe space to tell their stories but never attempts to tell her own story. All along, she fears that someday somebody will recognize her as the pilot's daughter. Writing is the only tool that will set her free, free her from the fear she lives exposed to but it takes her a while to get there.

Looking back at the past in order to reconfigure her life, to build her life on paper and writing will allow her to see the past with fresh eyes.

The photo album Zainab's mother had prepared for Zainab works as a useful analogy when thinking about her motive behind writing her autobiography. Her mother has put together photos of Zainab's life from the moment she was born, family photos, birthday photos, etc. After her mother's death Zainab realizes –much to her shock- that there is not even one photograph of Saddam Hussein in the album. She tries to understand if her mother took out his photos later on, or if she had never put them there in the first place. Zainab knows that her mother was always pretty selective about the memories she wanted Zainab to keep. (Salbi, Loc211) By writing her autobiography, Zainab is able to go past the story her mother tried to construct for her, she becomes able to break her silence as well as the life story handed to her by her mother. By the end of the novel, Zainab writes she does not want to be like her mother or her grandmother as they both took their stories to their deathbeds and died in silence. (Salbi, Loc4569)

Even though Zainab shows resistance towards an identification with her mother and grandmother, Zainab hands it to them, saying they were both very talented storytellers. Zainab states that it was from the stories she heard from them that she learnt that men were born to power and that women gained power through their smarts and kind hearts. (Salbi, Loc451) Zainab praises her mother and grandmother for their story telling skills, going on to show that the reason why she hesitates in identifying herself with them is that their stories were stories that were told, not written. By choosing to write, Zainab distances herself from them. When discussing the reactions she got after her autobiography was published in an interview, Zainab said that Iraqis stopped her father on the street to congratulate her. (Khaleeli, 2013) By writing, Zainab is both able to free herself but also able to open up a space where her distant father can give her approval. According to Zainab, all women ought to own their stories or risk becoming part of silence. (Morrison, 2012) Seeing women who were forced to remain silent, Zainab realizes the only way to revolt is by writing, by making sure that one's voice is heard by other. Writing breaks the eternal cycle of evil.

Zainab chooses to write about not what the photos show but what they hide, not what was constantly spoken but what was kept silent, and thus the title of her novel reflects this choice. Her mother has taken out Saddam's photos from the album but Zainab resisted and gave her autobiography his name. Zainab thus allows for repressed traumas to resurface, and in order to give meaning to the loss of her mother, as well as to free herself of the shackles of the past, Zainab breaks her silence. Joseph Ludin, when writing about psychoanalysis in his article, *Sürgün, Kök, Kriz* says, "The resuscitated memories, especially childhood memories result in the surface of certain objects. With these objects, a visible face, meaning to say reality is built, and we could say that this reality is less neurotic, more objective reality." (Ludin, 2014) This line of thinking works for autobiography as well. The autobiography written in exile, just like psychoanalysis, opens up a free and safe space for the individual. The neuroses and traumas reassessed in this manner allow for the individual to build a more authentic reality. Upon understanding the conditions and scope of her family's imprisonment, Zainab is able to stop blaming her parents for her traumas. This way, she is able to stop the past from constantly opening new wounds.

Zainab states in one of her interviews she gives years after her autobiography is published, that her homecoming to the Middle East is necessary. Sarah Morrison, who conducts the said interview writes "Adamant that Muslim women are either "victimized" by the West, or "demonized" by fundamentalist leaders, she hopes to "give a platform" to "all those voices in between".". (Morrison, 2012) Zainab's autobiography is a revolt against these two conflicting points of view towards putting Middle Eastern women in a box.

## **Women's Solidarity**

When writing about her mother, and her mother's friends, Zainab especially emphasizes how invincible they used to look to her. They are women who speak multiple languages, who are chic and independent. To Zainab, it feels like they are redefining womanhood and believing that they can have it all, the career, the family, the social life, etc. (Salbi, Loc234) Zainab's mother talks to Zainab about Zainab's grandmother, telling her that she was a very powerful women and that all her children (including Zainab's mother) always aspired to be like her; powerful, able and demanding. (Salbi, Loc887)

Women in Zainab's autobiography look for different ways of existing in her country and culture as an individual and ways in which they can expand the boundaries given to them by a patriarchal culture. Zainab states that when Saddam Hussein first came into power that a woman was able to voice her dissent as long as she made jokes or looked light-headed when voicing it. Zainab remembers her mother playing this game when it suited her as well. (Salbi, Loc648)

## **A Women Rebelling Against Patriarchy**

Zainab speaks of the difficulties she and her family faced because they were Shi'ites in a country where the majority were Sunni. According to Zainab, even though her name is a very common name in the Middle East, most Iraqis associate Zainab with Shi'ites. Believing that her name makes it difficult for her to blend in and that it is marking her as different, Zainab implores her mother to change it. In response, her mother tells her that Zainab was one of the most courageous women in the history of Islam. She was a figure who was brave enough that she spoke her mind, sent to exile, but kept talking about the horrors she saw, trying to make sure history never repeated itself. Zainab Salbi writes that she really likes this story, most probably sensing the parallels with her own life story. However, when she wanted to change her name, she writes she still was a teenager desperately in need of approval and blending in. (Salbi, Loc673)

Zainab Salbi makes peace with her name not when she is a teenager but, true to the story of the original Zainab, when she is in exile. By writing this autobiography, Zainab Salbi does what her mother told her the historic Zainab did; talking about the horrors she has experienced in the hope of stopping history from repeating itself. When she is finally able to talk about the trauma she experienced, she is already the director of a foundation making it easier for women victims of war to speak. She is trying to make sure that other women also find a commonality with figures like Zainab. Because she is no longer a teenager, she has already left Iraq and has already realized the importance of telling her story, rather than blending in.

The conflict between blending in and standing out is an integral one in Zainab's story and autobiography. When Zainab gets engaged for the first time, Saddam Hussein gifts her a green Mitsubishi. Apart from her fiancé and her family, nobody else knows who gave her the gift. Since it is the state that imports cars into the country and all the imported cars are white, Zainab's car stands out from the rest. Zainab writes that she used to love driving this car on the streets of Baghdad and that in a short time she embraced the car as her signature. (Salbi, Loc2607) She feels happy to be an individual, happy to break free from a group, to stand on her own. However, once her engagement is off and she is disappointed yet again, she says she was tired of not fitting in. Whenever things start to go south and Zainab feels fragile and vulnerable, she searches and looks for the comfort of her collectivist identity. Exile, for this reason, reawakens Zainab's desire to blend in to a group and be a part of a bigger picture.

Zainab tells of other families who reside in the farmhouse Saddam Hussein has built for them. Those families have given in to Saddam, their economic situations are much better and they act in a condescending manner towards Zainab and her family. They are different from Zainab's family in all manners but Zainab writes proudly when she talks about how she and her family could never fit in with them.

## **Mother: A Starting Point**

According to Stanton, in the relationship between the mother and the women writer, the mother figure represents a starting point that is different and similar, but also a mirror of possibilities. (Stanton, Smith & Watson, 1998) Zainab Salbi focuses her autobiography on her endless conflicts with her mother, and acts with the motivation of understanding her mother, or looking at the mirror at herself, in order to find traces of her own mother. She begins her autobiography with a story of her mother, and mentions a time when she used to sleep with her mother. This autobiographic narrative holds a mirror to Zainab's mother in order to allow her to rebuild her fragmented identity, one that has been broken in exile, and one that had to be reconfigured after the death of Saddam.

Zainab Salbi swings between adoration, compassion and bitterness towards her mother throughout the autobiography. Her mother's capability of solving social conundrums and her being adept at social gatherings exalts her in Zainab's eyes. In stories that take place in such settings, the mother symbolizes everything Zainab fails to be or do. Watching her mother's parties with adoration, Zainab's biggest fear is that she will never beat her shyness and dance or laugh the way her mother does. (Salbi, Loc 263) Zainab remembers how her mother cautioned her in the farmhouse to always hold her head up high when walking, because her mother hates meek women and wants Zainab to be a powerful, self-confident person. (Salbi, Loc1307)

Zainab's adoration towards her mother as well as the worry that her mother might get hurt color the entire autobiography. When she writes about the time she asked about her mothers' relatives being deported to Iran, she describes the anxious look in her mother's face by saying, "I adored my mother, and the last thing on earth I wanted to do was to cause her pain." (Salbi, Loc773) . Zainab is hurt profoundly upon seeing the pain her mother suffers at the difficult questions Zainab poses her mother; and this creates a dichotomy when she's trying to reconstruct her relationship with her mother in the novel. There are a lot of questions burning inside Zainab, answers she longs to find, she wants to know if Saddam ever hurt her mother but her mother declines to answer these questions.

However, knowing and learning the scope of the situation is a step towards healing for Zainab. She persistently keeps on asking. Even after the death of her mother, she keeps asking the same questions to her mothers' sisters and friends. Her entire act of writing this autobiography can be seen as a huge question mark. How can Zainab be mad at her mother if her mother suffered a worse fate than Zainab's?

There is only one memory Zainab wishes to erase from her mind. This memory concerns her mother. Once her brothers are already asleep and her father watching TV, Zainab goes to check on her mother and finds her amongst pills, unconscious. Her father is unabbreviated because of whiskey, so she calls her uncle who helps her mother. Zainab lies down next to her mother and holds her mother "like a mother holding a sick child" (Salbi, Loc 950) She remains scared of sleeping that night, fearing she might lose her mother. This night symbolizes the end of her childhood as it is her confrontation with a very ugly side of adulthood. Her mother apologizes from Zainab the next day and tells her that she feels like a bird in a cage, urging her never to be a bird in a cage. Zainab writes that although her mother was warning her never to be like her mother, all Zainab had ever wanted was to be like her mother.

Once she realizes she must not be like her mother, especially being aware of the prison they're living in, it becomes imperative to Zainab that her fate does not resemble that of her mother's. Her mother echoes this sentiment. This is why when Zainab's mother pressures her to accept the arranged marriage with an Iraqi living in the US, even though she loves her family and friends in Iraq, because she's deadly afraid of being imprisoned like her mother and father, she "doesn't say yes to Fakhri" but rather says yes to her Mama. (Salbi, Loc2757)

Years later, after Zainab divorces Fakhri, and marries a man who really loves her, builds a foundation to help women victims of war, taking care of these women, Zainab begins to feel helpless again. After a fight she has with her husband, the past and the future converge in her mind, lending her helpless. Imitating her mother, Zainab takes numerous pills like her mother, trying to die to be free, like her mother. However, Zainab realizes

that her conditions are quite different from that of her mother's. She stops taking the pills, drinks milk to make her throw up. She knows she has to drink milk because she has been on the both sides of the story – both the child trying saving the mother as well as the side wanting to die. (Salbi, Loc3766) Upon realizing that she is very close to mimicking her mother, but her own life is actually quite different from the prison that was her mother's, Zainab decides to go into therapy. With a nudge from her therapist, she starts writing letters to her parents. (Salbi, Loc3818) She will also be writing letters to her mother, to the mother who provided Zainab with her wonderful childhood but who also enabled Zainab to get married to the man who would later rape her. To the mother who betrayed her by turning her into something her mother hated most, a powerless woman.

Once her mother is able to escape the prison and cage of Saddam in Iraq, she falls into the hands of ALS disease meaning she will now be imprisoned by her own body. Zainab hands her mother a pen and a paper to set her free. Her mother, who has lost almost all motor function, is miraculously able to write. Zainab integrates her mother's said writing about her life with Saddam into her autobiography. Zainab's mother has been robbed of her voice and language, kept in a cage and even when she was able to escape the cage she lost her voice once again, but through the act of writing and through Zainab's incorporating of her mother's writing the mother regains her voice, her language and writing. This way Zainab opens a space for her mother who dies very young and without ever getting the opportunity to tell her own tale. Zainab Salbi, towards the end of the autobiography mentions her belief that there is a garden where women don't have to whisper. (Salbi, Loc 4718) By making her mother's writing public, she saves her mother from the mandate to whisper.

Trying to deal with the anger she feels towards her mother in exile, Zainab wants to show her mother everything she has achieved when she comes to visit. She needs the approval of the mother who she feels is both responsible and guilty of making Zainab who she is that day. Her mother only gives her this approval when she can no longer speak, but can only write. Her daughter, whom she always hoped would grow into a strong woman, had indeed turned out to be a strong woman and has surpassed the dreams that were dreamt

by her mother. (Salbi, 4314) Zainab Salbi, writes that when she found herself stranded in the US after the Gulf War, she felt she needed to rebuild a new identity. The first half of her life was so different from the second that it would be impossible to convince a person that they were lived by the same person.

In one of the arguments with her mother, Zainab begins to cry, blaming her mother for the hardships she had faced. Her mother tells Zainab the reason she insisted on the arranged marriage was because she had started to get frightened that Saddam might rape Zainab. With this revelation, Zainab is finally able to forgive her mother, with this revelation they are finally able to mourn for the losses they have suffered. After her mother's death, Zainab reads her mother's notebook and goes on a vacation with her husband. Finally she feels free, and light, and can do what her mother always wanted her to do, she can dance, and sing and live the life she wants to live. When her husband is surprised at the difference in Zainab, she tells him that she believes that her mother's death has given her soul and laughter to Zainab. (Salbi, 4320) Zainab is finally able to reconcile with the mother she had long tried to distance herself from, with the help of writing. When she looks in the mirror, she sees both her mother and a woman that looks nothing like her mother, because that woman has not accepted a cage, a woman that her mother would be proud of.

### **Father: Image of the Street and Success**

When writing about *hüzün* (sadness) in an article, Fatma Altzinger, states that unlike the melancholy of Freud, in *hüzün* (sadness) the person does not feel responsible for the loss of the thing, and does not feel to be less valuable. The feeling of sadness results in the world becoming less valuable while in melancholy it is the identity that gets less valuable. (Altzinger, 2014) Zainab tries to capture the feeling of being imprisoned in a country and the harm this situation did to her family and to her own character. However, when talking about her father, a certain sense of *hüzün* takes over. The loss of Zainab's father does not result in a fragmentation in Zainab's identity when she is writing her autobiography. When looking at her childhood photos, she writes that sometimes she

forgets how close they used to be, how much he made her laugh. Regardless, she does not attempt to re-live those days or to re-build that relationship. Her father is that which is already lost. Zainab does not feel a sense of worthlessness in her identity because of the loss of her father.

When writing about her memories with her father, Zainab remembers that her father was never an easy talker. However, she also reminisces about times when her father would come back from his travels, bringing them gifts. According to Zainab, her father is like a little cat and needs his space. For this reason, whenever she writes about getting her father's approval or outright display of pride, the narrative gains joy. One of these moments is when her father introduces her to the president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. Zainab remembers that her father was beaming with pride as he introduced his daughter, and Zainab remembers her father's "love could feel like sunshine." (Salbi, Loc1186)

Contrary to feelings of entrapment felt by her mother, Zainab's father is a pilot who has the entire world ahead of himself every time he goes to work. For this reason, her father is not only the representative of the street, and hence that which is political, social and economical, but also the symbol of the world outside Iraq. Zainab speaks of her father's adventures with planes at depth and with pride. Zainab sees this place like a limbo between heaven and the earth. And her father is the ruler of this great world. (Salbi, Loc1236) Therefore it doesn't surprise the reader to see that she tells her father she wants to be a pilot like him. She aspires to be like her mother who is adept at social situations but when it comes to her career choice and professional identity, Zainab chooses her father. Because as her mother is imprisoned at home, her father is able to fly into the horizon – but remain a prisoner nonetheless because he keeps returning to Iraq. If Zainab is to listen to her mother and not be a bird in a cage, she has to not be like her mother.

The contrast between Zainab's mother and father is most apparent with the repeated symbol of the caged bird, a symbol that pops up in the parts of the novel where things aren't going well with Zainab's mother. Zainab never writes about this contrast openly, but the reader ascertains it from how Zainab describes her mother as opposed to how she

describes her father. While her mother feels like a caged bird, her father has the ability to make metal birds fly and be free. Zainab writes that whenever her father went on one of his flights, she stayed behind and watched as her mother hit her wings on the walls of the cage. (Salbi, Loc1620) However her father eventually has to choose between being Saddam's friend and being his pilot and out of fear he chooses Saddam's friendship, not flying. This way, Zainab's father too becomes a prisoner like her mother.

Zainab has a difficult time understanding her father's inertia and resignation in front of Saddam. She writes about how her father scolds her upon hearing her criticize Saddam. Her mother on the hand, comes out to console her, telling her they have to be careful about what they say. (Salbi, Loc1486) Another time, there is an altercation between Zainab's father and one of Saddam's girlfriends. Zainab's father acts stubbornly, putting Zainab's mother in the crosshairs of Saddam. Memories like this make Zainab think less of her father. However, Zainab is still too young and still wants to think of her father as a powerful and capable man. She listens to her mother like a friend when she complains of her father but she writes she would have preferred to remain a child and not know. (Salbi, Loc 1539)

In time, her father starts behaving just like the Tikriri tribe, which is on the rise, acting in a more conservative manner. Uncomfortable with this change, Zainab confides in her mother. Her mother tells Zainab that her father has to behave this way as it is safer to blend in. Zainab understand her mother's point but she has also realized something: that her father has already resigned to Saddam Hussein. (Salbi, Loc 4856) What's more, Zainab paints herself as an individual who values the bravery of not fitting in. Once her father defects to the safety of blending in, a rift opens between them. As her father becomes weaker in front of Saddam, Zainab's identification with her father loses momentum. Once Zainab goes to college and has friends her father warns her "Remember, your friends are your friends because of who your father is." (Salbi, Loc2300) Just when Zainab felt her attempts at individualization were giving fruit, building her own identity, her father shatters the illusion, making Zainab an extension of herself rather than an individual. Despite the love Zainab used to have for her father, her

father's attempts are fruitless. Zainab no longer takes her father as a reference point and does not see him when she looks in the mirror.

### **Saddam – Father State**

Talking about Saddam, who is the reason why Zainab lost her country, talking about Saddam who appears on the title of the autobiography proves very difficult for Zainab, inciting terrible feelings in her. She remembers how disturbing it had been to her to be called the pilot's daughter when she was a child. This not only erases her own identity, defining her by her father, but it also defines her with her father's infamous passenger. Zainab however, always dreams of being free of it all, of flying without being confined to a cage.

Throughout the autobiography, in Zainab Salbi's descriptions of Saddam, alongside the constant fear and scary characteristics of Saddam, Zainab sometimes writes of him as a father figure with a conflicting warmth. This figure symbolizes both the state and the possible punishment in the event of Zainab acting against the rules set by him, a figure encompassing a sort of castration fear. Zainab also mentions that two male figures in her life are Saddam and her father. One of them is a man who has tortured millions, and the other one is a loving man whose wife felt so imprisoned that in order to escape she tried to kill himself. (Salbi, Loc3094)

Zainab incorporates both her point of view today, and the point of view she had back then when she's writing about Saddam. She writes that he was adept at making people feel special, looking at people as though he were really listening. It will take a while for Zainab to understand that when he looks intently, he's searching for something behind that person's eyes. (Salbi, Loc1389) One day, Zainab plays the Blue Danube Waltz without mistake and Saddam applauds her, and looks at her, eyes beaming. This look feels like a prize to Zainab. (Salbi, Loc1852) Just like with her father, with Saddam too, getting approval carries a lot of meaning.

## **City – The Child**

Just like Cairo is to Nawal el Saadawi, Baghdad is precious to Zainab. She muses, “How many cities on earth are so old, and yet still unborn?” when talking about it. (Salbi, 74) In this analogy, the city is that which is about to be born, that which is the child. Towards the end of the novel, Zainab is back in her city and delves on the same topic, asking a familiar question; “How many cities on earth were so desperate to survive they nearly tore themselves apart trying? How many were so old and yet unborn?” (Salbi, Loc 4712)

Zainab writes about a great bout of sadness as she is about to leave for the US to get married to a man she has never met. She feels as if flying into a black hole. (Salbi, 2783) She also writes that she would get scared whenever her mother talked about feeling like a caged bird because Zainab’s home is Iraq, and she loves her hometown. She can’t even dream of leaving it behind. (Salbi, Loc1620) Zainab eventually leaves Iraq for an arranged marriage, leaves this marriage behind with a terrible psychological scar and builds a new life for herself. After the Gulf War she learns that her mother too was able to leave Iraq, leave Saddam, leave her cage. But when her mother invites her to Jordan, Zainab refuses. She has now built a life of her own, so she tearfully looks at her mother and asks her to set her free. She will no longer try to be her mother or her father, but rather build a new identity.

Zainab writes that it took her nine years before she could see her father or Baghdad and she was unable to recognize both. (Salbi, Loc3419) Only after the Arab Spring and the death of Saddam does Zainab go on a journey back to the Middle East, only when she could construct her identity outside the pressures of her period and mother nation was she able to gain enough strength to come back to her country.

## **Political Awakening and Stance**

By way of its topic and structure, Zainab Salbi's autobiography never loses its proximity to political matters. Zainab and her family may be confined to their homes, but it is Saddam Hussein who is responsible for that condition. Therefore, throughout the autobiography, wars and the global affects of wars never cease to be mentioned.

But still, it will take some time for Zainab to reach a political awakening. When writing about the war with Iran, Zainab writes that only when she left the country was she able to learn that it had been Iraq who started the war. (Zainab, Loc612) When Zainab goes to college, she does not fully escape the feeling of imprisonment but with new friendships, she's able to get a glimpse of individualization. She writes about a friend telling her of the horrors inflicted on Kurds in this manner. What her friend tells her opens a switch that had been off in her mind for years.

Zainab finds herself too fragile both economically and psychologically once in the US with her oppressive husband. Her husband rapes her after a fight and Zainab goes into the shower, crying. When she gets out her husband wants her to get ready to meet his mother and Zainab feels something break inside of her. They start to fight again and her husband calls the police. Zainab leaves the house with the police, and goes back tomorrow to take her things. She also takes away one pillow case, as per the advice of her mother's friend. Zainab thinks an act so tiny could only be the revenge act of a woman. She still keeps that pillow case, she writes, it reminds her of a lesson, to never let a man harass her, and to always be a free spirit. (Salbi, Loc3094)

Zainab learns about the rights women have in Islamic marriages when she begins school in the US. (Salbi, Loc3432) She learns about feminism in college and is shocked to find out that some Western women are still struggling with matters like equal pay. (Salbi, Loc3519) One day she reads an article about rape camps in Bosnia and wants to do something about it. She starts learning about the conflict, reading books. She takes the first step towards helping women victims of war.

## **Looking at the West**

Zainab's books are her way of escaping the reality of the farmhouse her family goes to every weekend. She starts reading the longest books she can find. When talking about the recurring themes in these books, she mentions cousins killed at war, widows who have to sell their rings, and the white people who ignore the plight of brown colored people who are doomed to live poor lives. (Salbi, Loc 1448) Just like the other themes, the theme about white skinned people is criticisms to the West's indifference to Iraq's plight as well their involvement, which according to Zainab only made matters worst.

Zainab also mentions how gambling, smoking and alcohol were encouraged in Iraq in the name of modernization. Once in the US, she realizes Saddam gained points in the West with steps enabling these. Because of American peoples preoccupation with how women dress, Zainab believes Saddam was able to hide the rapes, the restrictions that were put on their freedom of speech and travel. (Salbi, Loc2055) She also criticizes the Western women, writing that they are not aware of the pressures that effect the way they dress, but are prejudiced towards Muslim women who cover their heads, not knowing that this decision is given by many educated women. (Salbi, Loc2389) Zainab not only writes about her mother, her grandmother and many other powerful women who lived in Iraq at that time, to break prejudices, she also criticizes how the West looks at the Middle East.

## **Exile**

Even though Zainab's exile technically begins the moment she has to leave her country, Zainab and her family are effectively in exile even when they are still in Iraq. They are members of Saddam Hussein's friend group but belong to the Shi'ite community he tortures. They don't belong to the world of the powerful, nor to the group of powerless. Zainab writes that she swings back and forth these groups, unable to tell how she feels to members of either group. (Salbi, Loc2211) This exile does not only cause an identity and

belonging conflict, it also leaves Zainab without a language to tell her story. Upon leaving Iraq, she regains the luxury to speak, to write, she regains her language.

When Zainab returns from exile to Iraq, she finds the childhood home of her mother and turns it into a home for women. She arranges for professional trainings, discussions and talks, organizing women. There she feels like she's returned to her country, also wishing her mother had been with her. (Salbi, Loc 4701) Coming back to the motherland is also coming back to the mother. Coming back to the hometown that she grew up in but had to break apart from, means to come back to the mother. To turn the childhood home of the mother to a place for women to speak, is to come back to the mother and turn the hands of fate. Breaking the silence of women in her mother's childhood home, allows for Zainab to deal with the answers she was never able to get from her mother. This way Zainab is able to reconnect with her mother.

The most pressing question for Zainab is why her parents continue to stay despite the social, economical, and political pressures they faced under the Saddam regime. She then remarks that this question was likely posed by many children of parents who allowed for dictatorships to rise all around the world. (Salbi, Loc1597) Zainab has had to leave her country, exile isolates her but it also groups her together with people who ask the same question. She is not alone. She belongs to a group. That group is not held together by country, but by the fate of having had to leave one.

Zainab refuses to hide her Iraqi identity when she is in exile in the US during the Gulf War and she is advised by people to say that she is from Saudi Arabia. Zainab feels her family has suffered too much to prove they were Iraqis, Zainab is an Iraqi too and proud of it. (Salbi, Loc3128) She thus embraces the identity people try to extract from her. Another characteristic she embraces is her propensity to go towards war zones. The same propensity could have been seen in Nawal el Saadawi as well. Zainab Salbi writes that she often finds herself in war zones, perhaps because they are her comfort zone. She feels like the kid from Jungle Book who runs to the jungle whenever something goes wrong. War zones are her jungle. She keeps returning to the bullets and the agonies of strangers.

(Salbi, Loc3730) Not only is Zainab an Iraqi in exile, but she also knows, understands, and has lived through wars.

Zainab Salbi comes across the LA Times journalist, Laurie Becklund once who sees Zainab teary eyed, asking to have an interview with her. Zainab has trouble talking about herself to a journalist. She is not an immigrant, nor a tourist. She had come to the country as a bride, but was no longer one. Once she lost all her assigned identities, Zainab was able to find the space she needed to construct her own life.

After the death of her mother and the second war in Iraq, Zainab goes to Iraq, swearing off never to go there again as long as there was Saddam. She asks herself where her home is then. In Iraq? In the US with her new husband? Eventually, she decides her home is when she's flying up in the air. (Salbi, 4427) After leaving for exile once, the only home she knows is the home that used to belong to her father.

### **Mirrors and First Person Singular**

Zainab Salbi writes her autobiography in first person singular but she is not the sole writer of the autobiography. Laurie Becklund is her co-writer. This means that Zainab's first person singular is actually a crowded singular. The first writer of the novel is Zainab, desperately trying to erase the effects of her traumas, and the second writer is the unseen Laurie Becklund, who guides Zainab, and who has played an integral part in Zainab's new life in exile.

When Zainab writes about the day she found out her mother wouldn't be sent to Iran, she writes that she stood by the Tigris River and thought about how many Iraqis stood by the same river before her. (Salbi, Loc846) The anxiety of almost having to lose the mother, pushes Zainab to an identification with a country and the people who have lived before in that country. Zainab is not just an individual, she is the continuation of everyone who lived before her, everyone with whom she shared a bloodline or fate.

## **Womanhood, Appearance, Sexuality**

Remembering her mother who used to say that life could not be paused, Zainab writes that many things happened during the war. Her baby brother begins to walk, Zainab gets her first period and discovers that her mother has secrets. Just like in other parts of the world, Zainab states that getting one's period is an important turning point. After getting her period, she is considered a young girl now who should fast in Ramadan and not swim with boys. (Salbi, Loc673) By drawing a temporal parallel with her period blood and war, Zainab Salbi foreshadows to the reader of the rifts that are about to come. This turning point will not only bring Zainab to adulthood, but it also signifies the turning point the country is in, the war that will take Zainab away from her mother, and in the long run, her country.

Zainab writes about her first period with ease, as it is not a taboo subject in her house. She might be the only girl in her circle who is excited about getting her period, or the only girl who shares this news with her father. She realizes that this openness might be specific to her family as she is aware how in Arabic cultures the female body is off-topic with fathers. (Salbi, Loc700) Similarly, sex is never a taboo subject for Zainab's family. Zainab knows that sex is something her parents do secretly, something that gives them joy.

Zainab eventually understands her mother, and realizes that while she was trying to save her she actually pushed her deeper into her wounds. The only way for Zainab to compensate for her past traumas is in helping other women who have been imprisoned in similar settings. Zainab's autobiography is a way for her to forgive her mother so that she can identify with her again. She has given up on her father a long time ago. Her mother on the other hand, has told Zainab to never fit in, never live in a cage, and to never live her life dependent on a man. Zainab inherits her mother's freedom. And her autobiography works to underline that.

## SHUSHA GUPPY – THE BLINDFOLD HORSE

### IN THE SHADOW OF FATHERS

Shusha Guppy is not an exile in the specific sense of the word; because she does leave Iran out of difficulties, she rather leaves to get a European college education. When leaving her country, Shusha Guppy is motivated by the desire to see foreign lands, not knowing that in a short time her country will become a foreign land to her as well. Living in France and London, Shusha Guppy is professional musician, a novelist, and the editor of Paris Review's British edition. "Blindfold Horse" is her second autobiography, as the first one is about her college life in Paris.

#### Writing – A Rebellious Act

Despite her mother's insistence that she give her attention to the guests that come to their house, Shusha Guppy writes that she used to keep being immersed in books. However, in her autobiography as she reconstructs the homeland she has lost and standing against prejudices about her culture, she prefers not to touch on her identity as a writer.

Writing thus becomes an almost unconscious way of standing up to challenges in a way. After Shusha leaves Iran, she works as a successful musician. However, even though she keeps writing about how much she loved to perform, she had not been allowed to do so in Iran in public after puberty. She goes against this rule put forth by her parents because of the fear of what people would think. She sings in 'exile' but she sings songs from her homeland. Shusha writes, "History shows that civilization and progress often gain through the achievements of 'the one who strays'; freedom flourishes on heresy." (Guppy, 48) Music hence becomes a way for Shusha to break free from the identity handed to her from her family, and to resist in her chosen one.

Joan Riviere, in her article *Womanliness as a Masquerade* asserts that women who become really successful in man-dominated sectors and industries tend to compensate for

their success through overtly and exaggeratedly womanly acts. (Riviere, 1929) Riviere believes that women who aspire to be successful in traditionally male dominated areas fear castration by male father figures if they find out about these aspirations. In return, they use womanliness as a masquerade. Shusha's reluctance in asserting her authorship but still writing an autobiography can be seen as this light. She inhabits a space traditionally reserved for men but she does not comment on it.

When talking about her father, Shusha emphasizes how he was very fluent in Arabic, that he wrote some of his philosophy books in Arabic. She also writes about how in accordance with Riza Shah's directions, he handled the Arabic word cleanse from Persian, that he found many Persian words himself. Although a great deal of space given to Shusha's relationship with her father, and her father's relationship with literature and despite the autobiographical nature of the narrative, Shusha never draws a parallel between her act of writing and that of her father's. She doesn't talk about how she came to be interested in writing either. Instead, she writes about how successful she was in high school, how she became valedictorian in her program and how loved she was by her teachers.

But Shusha herself is aware that only that which is written can stand the test of time. While she writes about the importance of alternative medicine, she writes that "unfortunately, once a tradition is lost it has gone forever, especially when it has been transmitted orally and there is no written knowledge of it." (Guppy, 204) Shusha's autobiography can be seen as a way to fight with this anxiety. She's rebuilding a world she thought she has lost, fearing that she might lose the accumulation of knowledge she has gathered in her homeland. She never underlines her act of writing, that she is now traversing into what had been the domain of her father.

### **Mother: A Starting Point**

Although Shusha devotes a great deal of the autobiography to her father, her father's accomplishments, the praise her father received from the outside, she gives little space to

her relationship with her mother, her mother's character or accomplishments. For Shusha, her father represents reason and science while her mother represents feelings and a more rudimentary way of knowing. The reactions of her mother and father to the death of their first baby reflects this dialectic in Shusha's mind; "while my father allowed his sorrow to express itself against a background of surrender to God's will, my mother's pagan soul rebelled at the fundamental iniquity of the human condition – she cried profusely." (Guppy, 66) Throughout the autobiography words like information, wisdom, science, and position are reserved for the father. When Shusha's mother implores Shusha's father to intervene since their children seem to be staying away from religion, Shusha's father acts in an understanding manner, saying these things can't be forced. "And of course he was right" writes Shusha. (Guppy, 185) And all through the novel, her father will keep being right.

However according to Shusha, unlike her father, her mother is adept at money management. Her father is incapable in practical matters that do not pertain to academics. That is why Shusha's mother manages the money and can bargain really well. Even though Shusha has been raised by a mother like that in Iran, she is too shy to bargain like her. (Guppy, 69) Her mother handles the business of the house, makes sure that they have everything with the little money they have, wherein her father comes down to dinner when he is called. However, it is the father she speaks of when she says "He was a warm, affectionate but remote godhead we all worshipped and relied on." (Guppy, 71) In the same chapter, it is the father who makes sure that their house is politically and socially active, there are guests that keep on coming and Shusha writes about this with adoration. Her mother buys pretty costume dresses for Shusha and her sister from the money she puts aside from the house's expenses, so Shusha and her sister are never far behind their friends who are well-off. (Guppy, 109) However, the same adoration can't be found when she writes about how her mother is good in money matters.

Shusha talks about her desire to get on the stage and dance repeatedly in her autobiography, her academic life only gains momentum for her once artful activities resume. Still, nobody from her family comes to watch her shows, except for her mother.

Her mother also gets permission from her father, despite the father's objections, for Shusha to learn a musical instrument, with the condition that she does not play in public. Discouraged by her family's attitude Shusha makes sure both her sons take violin lessons. They might not be successful musicians but they will never feel the lack Shusha did when she was young. (Guppy, 132) Shusha never outright blames her parents but the mention of this carries within itself a subtle sense of sorrow.

Unlike Zainab Salbi's mother, Shusha Guppy's mother is not painted as a character who wishes to raise her daughters to be fighters. On the contrary she keeps on advising Shusha and her sister that women ought to be speak low, as speaking in a high tone would leave a bad impression. (Guppy, 114) Shusha also writes about the modernization efforts that begin with Riza Shah's directions, and how women shed the chador. Shah Riza consults Shusha's father in religious matters and when asked about the chador, her father replies that it pertains to women's honor but the shape does not really matter. Almost all the women in Shusha's family leave their chadors, as Shusha says, 'like educated women'. However, Shusha's mother never gives up her headwear or her traditional ways. Shusha never criticizes this choice outwardly but her sentiment of disapproval makes itself known. As opposed to her mother's insistence on tradition, Shusha writes the young generation took to new freedoms with zeal. Shusha and her friends even had a hard time understanding why women were covered in the first place. (Guppy, 123) This way, Shusha distances herself as modern and free as opposed to the identity of her mother as she sees it. Unlike her mother, she can't bargain. Unlike her mother, she does not abide by tradition. Unlike her mother, she doesn't wear a headdress and can't even conceive why a woman would. The autobiographical narrative underlines the difference Shusha points at towards herself and her mother.

Up until the finale. Shusha ends her autobiography right when she's about to leave for France. Here, Shusha realizes that she is about to leave her home for the first time, that she would now live in a foreign country, with foreign people, be alone, and miss her friends and family. Although her autobiography begins with the lives of her grandfather and father figures, the finale emphasizes her embrace with her mother. Her mother urges

her to stay, what would it matter? Shusha however is hesitant as to what she would tell her friends and teachers, so she writes that she could not find the courage to stay. She confesses; “All my future life was shaped by that one piece of cowardice. I would have to be very brave from then on to make up for it.” (Guppy, 242)

The love she is given by her mother, without her ever asking for it, the love she carelessly is about to leave behind, she writes she would not be able to find even on thousandth of that love. The mother who never fully appears in Shusha’s narrative with her character, her dreams, losses and victories, the mother who always stands in the shadows in the narrative is who Shusha chooses to end her life narrative with.

In spite of the reluctance to identify with the mother, Shusha’s desire to identify with the father is remarkable. The line she draws between herself and her mother disappears when she draws an analogy between the loss of homeland and the loss of the mother. Shusha, ends her novel by realizing that the woman staring back at her in the mirror, the support in her identity is her mother.

### **Father: Image of the Street and Success**

In her book, “Fictionalized Selfhoods” (original: “Kurgulanmış Benlikler”) Nazan Aksoy writes that “The thing that creates the desire to write is not to record what has happened in the past but rather a need to rethink the past in today’s conditions. To re-design everything, including history, according to today’s conditions, and according to a desired future. This is what the autobiography author is capable of doing.”<sup>5</sup> (Aksoy, 210) In this light, one of the most interesting choices in Shusha’s autobiography is how she chooses to write about the lives of her male ancestors in depth until she writes about herself, how she recreates her family mythologies through the male individuals of her family. After writing that her first memory was the memory of a blindfold horse, forced to run around himself, Shusha continues her life narrative by first writing about her grandfather, than

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<sup>5</sup> “Yazma güdüsünü doğuran şey, geçmişte olup biteni olduğu gibi yazma ihtiyacı değil, bugünün şartlarında bir ‘yeniden düşünme’ ihtiyacıdır. Günün şartlarında başta tarih olmak üzere her şeyi yeniden, olması istenen bir geleceğe göre tasarlamak... Otobiyografi yazarının yapabileceği tek şey budur.” Nazan Aksoy

her father and how they began to get success in life. Morel writes that because of changing social conjunctures, the womanly self has now changed places with 'being the phallus'. (Morel, 2000) According to Jacques-Alain Miller, women can be divided to two groups, women are phallus, and postiche women. Miller asserts that women who are phallus can be so because they are aware of the lack of phallus. However, postiche women hide their lack and look to complete themselves with a man they would fall under the shadow of. (Miller, 2000) Shusha who chooses to distinguish herself from her mother, also chooses to redefine her life story through the life stories of male figures and their social and professional successes in life. This can be seen as an attempt at identification with them as well as an attempt at hiding a lack of phallus.

Shusha also writes about the male figures on her mother's side of the family when writing her autobiography. All the father figures are written about in great detail, as she mentions their characteristics, nature, education and successes however the women in her family only play into the story when they get married to these men. Apart from the short prologue about the blind horse in the beginning, Shusha does not enter her own life narrative before page 61.

Shusha does not believe that as the second daughter her birth carries any interesting meaning. Her sister was the first daughter and brought color to her family, while Shusha just happened. Aware of this, she asks her father once if he ever wanted a boy instead of a girl. Her father tells her that yes he did but not because boys are better, because there are too many things to worry about girls. (Guppy, 62) Shusha then writes that she knows that she is born to an Iran that is rapidly changing, a country that is not quite sure where to stand between change and tradition. That she turns to Iran right after her father's revelation is Shusha's way of understanding and forgiving her father. In the following sentences Shusha writes of how much of a problem she caused her family through her radical political activities, settling in Europe and marrying a British man. All these activities can be read as Shusha's attempts at breaking away from her parents and asserting and proving her own individuality.

Shusha writes about the father figures in both her mother and her father's sides as man who has had successes and a social standing. When Riza Shah is head of the country and he decides to modernize it, the writing of the new Civil Code for Modern Iran falls on to Shusha's grandfather. By that time Shusha's parents are married thus the new Civil Code is shaped by Shusha's father's ideas. Shusha proudly asserts that this Civil Code is considered amongst the most precious legal documents in the world, comparable to the Napoleon Code. (Guppy, 23) Shusha's father and his successes find a way to pop up throughout her autobiography.

Shusha's father represents success, admiration and maturity to Shusha. In psychoanalysis, it is the mother who provides the communication to the mother and the first word, while language belongs to the male dominated areas; in Shusha however her father is the 'father' of communication, writing and of course, the word. Not just symbolically, at that. Shusha writes that her father found many words like *Saadi, Hafiz, and Nezami* in Persian when trying to rid Persian of Arabic words. (Guppy, 51) Shusha also writes that her father had a very pleasant baritone voice, that it effected Shusha deeply to hear him recite the Qur'an. She has been looking for her father's voice in every beautiful voice she has heard since then, getting more pleasure in the voice when it sounded like her father's. (Guppy, 149) That Shusha herself becomes a musician when she grows up and is very far away from her country, only proves her desire to further identify with her father in the absence of a motherland.

### **A Limbo Between Home and the Street**

The freedoms allowed boys and girls are very different in Shusha's childhood in Iran, and Shusha makes sure these differences are apparent in her autobiography. Shusha knows she grows up in a man's world. In this world, girls are expected to stay at home with their mothers and they eventually "became miniature women, wearing little chadors and playing with rag dolls." (Guppy, 98) On the other hand, boys can live their lives on the street, play ball games, ride bikes and be free. Shusha asserts that she and her siblings were lucky because they had grand rooms and a big garden and many friends to play in

those with. Still, they got bored from time to time. Not for long, she writes, for soon they would discover books, and parties and love.

The difference between the home and streets or various other public places finds itself most apparent in Shusha's singing. After entering puberty, her parents forbid her from singing in front of people. In later years, after the Iran she knew and loved is lost with the revolution and Shusha built a life for herself in Europe, she continues to sing professionally, making records of songs she used to sing in Iran. She is able to find in exile the space she was longing for in her own country and youth. Yes she is away from her country and home but she is on a symbolic street she can stay at without needing permission. Exile is the street outside the home. But she will fill that street with songs and novels that talk of her home.

### **Political Awakening and Stance**

Guppy writes that her high school years represented a sort of political, emotional and artful awakening. She is getting more curious by the second, and her country is in political turmoil. This turmoil is so far-reaching that even 12 or 13 year old students are politicized. Shusha writes that the most popular political ideologies of the time were nationalism and communism, that people from both parties wanted her father to join them but he refused them both. In comparison, after her political awakening Shusha embraces a political stance that is close to communism. She implies that once more her father proved that he was far-sighted.

Shusha's point of view on Iran gains clarity in her autobiography. She writes in length about Iran's pre-Islamic culture and the traditions from that period with praise. Dreams and premonitions also prove frequent in the autobiography, as Shusha believes these two are tools that the Iranian soul tries to make use of in embracing a religion that is incompatible with its essence. (Guppy, 49)

Even though she writes about her opinions of the revolution, she never explains the effects the revolution had on her psyche or that of her family. Instead, she refers to the revolution every time she finishes a chapter in which she wrote about anecdotes from her family's or her own history. The revolution is thus that which is referred to, that which can only be reached through implication for Shusha. She writes that there were many 'settlers' and looters who started living in their home after 1979 and adds; "But is that not what most revolutions are all about these days: power and possessions changing hands, evil shifting grounds?" (Guppy, 84) By going back to the revolution every time a chapter ends, she underlines the world that she has lost once more. The time period of the autobiography is a world before the revolution and with the arrival of the revolution, Shusha loses that world altogether.

Since Shusha's parents are trying to adapt to the changing times but also to keep their traditions, Shusha writes that they could give parties but they could not play music as neighbors would have been shocked. She then writes about social changes, that these changes should not be made by pressure or they do not work. Shusha believes that the high momentum of the changes in the 1960s and 1970s allowed for the 1979 incidents to take place and made the hands of demagogues stronger. Regardless, she admits that in her time they were in a hurry to get rid of traditions and prohibitions. (Guppy, 109) Although she is aware of the trauma of the revolution, and although she does not share her mother's religiousness she does not shy away from criticizing Riza Shah's modernization politics. She believes everyone is a culprit in what followed. Some with their inertia, some with their over-the-top lifestyles, and some with being unsure as to who to entrust with power, are responsible.

### **Women's Solidarity**

Just like Zainab Salbi hands the pen (microphone) to women who never had a chance to get their story told, whose words and stories would have otherwise been lost, Shusha Guppy also hands the pen to her aunt Ashraf with her fairy tales multiple times, making her a story teller collaborator almost in Shusha's autobiography. Her aunt's stories

especially have a way of surfacing when Shusha is in a conflict she's trying to get out of, or is looking for the soothing quality of a story that is being told. For example, Shusha loves the story of how her mother and father met, and makes her aunt tell this story repeatedly. She incorporates this story not by paraphrasing it but through how it was told by her aunt. Again, when writing about the parties she used to go to in the house of a prince, and how everyone behaved according to social and complicated hierarchy, she writes the story her aunt used to tell her about Nasreddin Hojja. In another instance when writing about the prevalence and benefits of leech therapy, Shusha emphasizes the usefulness of this antic tradition with a story of her aunt's. (Guppy, 209) In all these examples, Shusha's aunt's contribution to the autobiography (most probably done unbeknownst to the aunt) comprises of stories, fairy tales and legends, the kind of stuff that easily gets lost because people are not in the habit of writing them down. Shusha takes the metaphoric microphone and pen to her aunt, thus giving her the words that used to belong to her (the) father.

Shusha's narrative follows a feminist stance. She writes in depth about the society of Iran before the Islamic Revolution. She writes about her aunt Batool, how she had to fight her way out of an unhappy marriage, tormented by her two sister-in-laws and in the end her child was taken away from her. To Shusha, her aunt symbolizes the women who have had to fight to ensure that they too are allocated a space to live in dignity. She writes that her aunt;

“epitomized multitudes of Persian women of her generation and class: abused virgins, long-suffering wives, deprived mothers and desperate spinsters, all victims of iniquitous laws and antiquated customs based on perverted religiosity, whose beauty and gifts were lost between the Charybdis of emancipation and the Scylla of traditional securities.” (Guppy, 36)

Shusha makes the reader see how the patriarchal systems and gaze always stand against women through the anecdotes she shares. She also praises the women who are able to carve out a space for themselves through their dignified struggle. Shusha's grandmother Halima is distinctly different from the other women in the autobiography. According to

Shusha, unlike other women of her time, her grandmother is not a meek woman. She has enough money, she is spiritual and despite her second husband (Shusha's grandfather) she is religious. Another strong woman in the narrative is the wife of one of the workers in the house, Ali. Ali doesn't like the girl because she has dark skin and wants to send her back. She refuses, and Ali eventually falls in love with her. Shusha writes that in time Ali became meek and quiet, as his wife proved that she was a "born matriarch" and showed her authority and self-confidence through ordering Ali around. (Guppy, 87)

Their neighbor, Mrs. Ramy is also a woman character that gets Shusha's praise. She works, benefits from advantages for women of the modernization process. (Guppy, 106) Shusha writes that the Ramy family is very "modern" as the matriarch works and this is very rare for those times. That the Ramy children's mother works also means that she goes to the office where there are men and women, her head uncovered, her arms visible under her short-sleeves. Shusha would gladly change places with Mrs. Ramy's daughter Shirin even though she fails in class, as she can go to any dance she wants. (Guppy, 108)

Despite this feminist stance, Shusha doesn't dwell on the class differences or social nuances when she's writing about her male relatives' mythologies. She writes that her paternal grandfather was a very libidinous man. So when his second wife Amineh marries him and realizes she could not curb his sex drive, she decides to take matters into her own hands. She hires young and beautiful servant girls and sends them to massage her husband's feet. Haji Seyit Muhammad is an imam himself, so he executes the marriage ceremony himself in Arabic, then asks the servant girl "Do you accept?" in Persian and according to Shusha, "the hapless girl would answer, 'Yes', out of politeness, and that would be that." (Guppy, 18) Shusha mentions the teary eyes and disheveled hair of the servant girls but does not outright mention that her grandfather raped these young women. She also does not write about how this was an abuse of socio-economic power.

## **The Mother's Distance to a Native and Foreign Language**

Shusha Guppy writes her autobiography in a language that is not her mother tongue, in a culture she has adopted and raised her sons in, in English and in Britain. There are various Persian and French words in the novel but the autobiography seems to be written for Western audience, with the knowledge that it will probably never be published in her own motherland.

In high school, Shusha chooses English when she has to choose a foreign language. Before her time, the inclination had been for children to study French, the language of the West, the court and diplomacy. But after the war Shusha writes that this has changed. The students also have to learn Arabic. Shusha says that since it was a difficult language, not well known by the instructors themselves and because of the religious connotations no student really liked this class. Shusha however, is very interested in learning Arabic because she loves Persian language and literature and she believes there are effects of Arabic on Persian. (Guppy, 139) Furthermore, she writes that her father is an expert on Arabic, and that he wrote some of his books in this language. None of these foreign languages are known to her mother, but when Shusha is in Iran, it is the father, not the mother she identifies with.

## **Exile**

Shusha paints a protagonist who dreams of foreign lands. In her autobiography, Shusha imagines putting ladders on top of each other and reaching the Milky Way, going to the end of the world. (Guppy, 77) She writes about the time she played with a toy named Shahre-Farang. She imagines living farther away from the Seven Mountains and Seven Seas, to meet foreigners, see exotic and beautiful places. Of feeling at home. She even admits; "Of such yearnings, exiles are made." (Guppy, 95) The Shahre-Farang toy has ignited a desire for Shusha for experiences that are outside of her what her life looks like.

As these dreams are repeatedly told, it is easy to understand Shusha's desire to live elsewhere. She writes about how she used to visit Mrs. Bahram after school, listening to her son's endeavors in Paris. She dreams of Paris as if it was a "Promised Land". (Guppy, 101) She is just 10 then, and the probability of going to Paris is "as low as the possibility of going to the Moon" still she does not give up this dream. In another story, she writes about the mural in a prince's home, and how she could not take his eyes away from it. Inspired by the artwork of a Western artists, there is a depiction of a garden of heaven almost. The art is very different from Persian paintings, as the figures in it are apparently very Western. She remembers how she used to stare at this mural for hours, wishing to go to the exotic countries she felt she could not reach then. (Guppy, 116)

These celestial analogies that crop up whenever Shusha writes about living someplace other than Iran stand to show how distant she felt the possibility to live outside of her motherland seemed to her than, but how successful she would have thought of herself if she could ever make it.

Though she repeatedly refers to exile in her autobiography, Shusha never openly mentions an anxiety about being able or unable to return to Iran. Her autobiography ends just when she is about to leave Iran. This choice puts into perspective many things about Shusha Guppy's autobiography. Unlike Nawal el Saadawi, Zainab Salbi and Hanan Al-Shayk, Shusha Guppy marries a non-Eastern man and has two sons. Her children aren't raised according to Persian culture. They even tell their father that they found their mother's land strangely peculiar when they go to visit Iran. To Shusha, it is not that she had left Iran, but that the Iran she was raised in no longer exists, that constitutes the real tragedy.

The image of a heavenly garden is invoked many times in the autobiography. The first of these is when her uncle Alem insists on uprooting all of the trees in their garden to make their garden more like the French ones. Shusha finds the image of their garden being ruined to make it look more like a French garden incredibly traumatizing. This also symbolizes the effect of colonial pressures and the effects of Westernizing politics on the

traditional values and culture of Shusha's homeland. She writes that years later she visits many gardens in Britain that look similar to their previous garden but no garden matches theirs in beauty. Because that garden to Shusha, symbolizes the "lost paradise of childhood" (Guppy, 79) And she likens herself to the nightingale in the garden she lost when she was a kid, just like the bird Shusha too has left to never return again. Her homeland to her is as far away as the Garden of Eden, and the exotic lands, and countries outside of Iran are now very close by. She never underlines the pain she feels from the loss of her departure. Instead, she makes it felt in nostalgia driven sentences like "I left a big library behind when I left for Europe – or it seemed big at the time." (Guppy, 147)

Shusha frequently writes about other people like her, who have had to flee their country, always emphasizing that the loss of these people also meant loss of potential for her country. By mentioning them Shusha also underlines how the culture and country she had been brought up in no longer exists, that it has vanished along with the people who made the culture come about. Some of these exiles are told as Iran's most popular music producers. Shusha laments how many of the musicians they worked with have also died, gone to exile, or have remained in her their homes, never going out. (Guppy, 154)

When writing about her departure from Iran, Shusha is still unable to understand how her parents allowed her to leave. She can think of a couple of possibilities. She believes her parents could have been worried about the increasing political tensions in the country, and that she would embarrass her family with her left-leaning political ideology, they could have worried about her prospects of marriage since she was a free spirit, they may have found themselves with not many options, looking at how Westernization was sweeping the country. Or, Shusha believes, they wanted her to better herself and to be able to express herself. (Guppy, 240) All of the possibilities Shusha can think of point to her parents allowing her to leave because they too believe it would be best for her. It is important that Shusha mentions this, as if to say that if her traditional parents felt she had to leave, no one can blame Shusha for abandoning them or her country.

In the end, when writing about her life in Iran, Shusha remembers that one can't feel lonely if one never has the opportunity to be alone. She then states that it was only when she came to Europe that she was able to understand what a terrible tragedy it is to be lonely. Yes, the crowded life she lead in Iran has a way of standing in the way of privacy, but who would want to be alone forever? (Guppy, 220) Shusha has grown up dreaming of foreign and far away lands, but with the loss of her country, a chronic loneliness and a fragmentation in her identity has also found her.

### **Mirrors and the First Person Singular**

One of the most striking things in Shusha's autobiography is how she reverts to the use of first person plural after the narrative turns to her life after puberty. Shusha prefers to use first person plural almost exclusively when she retells her life story, various anecdotes about her life and memories in Iran. Whenever Shusha writes about something that happened when she was out of Iran, she changes back to first person singular.

It is especially remarkable that when she comments on political matters, or on her family's traditional ways, Shusha reverts to first person plural. She writes about the women in her family giving up their chadors wherein her mother continues wearing her headwear. Right after this sentence she writes it was incomprehensible to the Shusha and other youth of her time how women could wear it. She does not write about it as if it was her own judgment. Not wanting to criticize her mother overtly, Shusha still can't stop her point of view from being clarified. This way, she can stay away from a clear confrontation with the idea of her mother. When she presents her opinion as that of a group, the difference she has with her mother becomes a generational difference rather than an individual one.

When Shusha writes that her belief in religion was losing power, and that she was getting interested in new ideologies, Shusha uses "us" instead of "I". For example, she writes, "We thought religion was obsolete, a leftover from the dark, superstitious past, and that it would disappear completely when everyone received the education we were privileged to

have.” (Guppy, 190) Especially when she writes about the time after high school, the use of first person singular becomes even more rare. When writing about how interests suddenly changed and certain interests like dieting, admiring Western models and making new friends became popular, she never uses I, but rather we. It is not always clear if the group she refers to in this us/we contains her brothers as well. The frequent usage of first person plural stands to show that Shusha was not acting alone, that her desires, wants and opinions were those of a group, meaning she was not alone, not broken off from everything she had grown up with. Shusha who believes that living outside Iran means a chronic solitude, can thus re-configure a collectivist identity for herself.

This technical choice not only saves Shusha from a direct challenge with her mother, but it also emphasizes the collectivist ways of living and ways of constructing identities in the Middle East. Rather than individualization or rather than constructing one’s identity by looking at oneself from the outside, it is more customary for a Middle Eastern young woman to construct one’s identity through a more referential standpoint. Rather than the lonely life Shusha mentions in exile, life in Iran is more crowded and collectivist and thus the identity formed there proves to be a much more collectivist one.

When Shusha writes about one of her father’s friends, Uncle Hadi she says; “He adored our father, and all of us for being related to him, and we called him Uncle Hadi in response.” (Guppy 214) Shusha does not present the reader with her own feelings, but rather those of her siblings’ and herself. However, once Shusha leaves Iran and comes back to visit him she converts to using “I” instead of “we”. Leaving her home also means leaving her collective identity.

Furthermore, using the less commanding we rather than an authoritative and all-knowing I, can point to a desire on Shusha’s part on not presenting herself as an authority on matters concerning her homeland. But whenever Shusha writes about her life outside of Iran, her point-of-view in England or France, then she begins to form sentences with first person singular. I belong to the West, to France, to Britain, to exile, to being away from one’s country. We belong to Iran, to her homeland, and her home. Shusha also returns to

first person singular when writing about her education and about the times she got to sing. Music is where she can exist as herself, no matter where, in exile or at home, she can be the one person she wants to be. Shusha dedicates her book to her siblings Nassir, Nasser and Badri and to the memory of her parents, as a way of redefining that collectivist identity as well.

### **Looking at the West**

When writing her autobiography, Shusha Guppy repeatedly uses an analogy where she imagines how things would have turned out in the West. The first time she uses this is when writing about her paternal grandmother Halima. A religious woman, Shusha believes her grandmother would have been a nun, a nurse or a missionary if she had lived in the West. However, where she lives there are no such options for a Muslim woman who has never gotten married, so she believes her life's purpose is making a man happy and bringing children into the world. Later on when Shusha writes about her Uncle Hassan, she writes that if he had been living in the West, he would have turned out to be a Franciscan rabbi. (Guppy, 37) Shusha once again draws a similar analogy for her father Kazem when she muses, "Years later, when I visited some monasteries in France, I realized how happy he would have been as a monk, had he been born in a Christian country. As it was he became a dervish – a Sufi." (Guppy, 50)

These parallels between the West and Iran serve multiple purposes. Shusha laments the opportunities that she feels they missed because they lived in Iran rather than the West. Shusha also writes this autobiography in English, gets the book published in English so she is perhaps trying to ameliorate the possible alienation and difficulties in identifying with the characters the Western readers might have when reading about a Persian and Middle Eastern culture. By drawing such parallels, Shusha is also able to insist on the universality of the human experience.

Almost all the women writers here write about the prevalent beauty standards of the cultures they live and how these standards are influenced by Western ideals. In almost all

of the cultures mentioned in these novels, Western characteristics seem to be thought of as popular. When talking about her grandmother Agha Begum, Shusha describes her as having “a fair complexion, blond hair and grey eyes – all highly appreciated qualities in the South.” (Guppy, 22) Her aunt Azra, too has “unusual looks: blonde hair, grey-green eyes, high cheekbones and a very fair complexion, ‘just like a Farangi (European)’” (Guppy, 53) Shusha writes about the wife of one of her favorite uncles, Emad by saying she was “a very pretty girl, with porcelain-white skin, deep blue eyes and long blonde hair, all rare and highly desirable attributes in a country of black-eyed women with complexions the color of ‘wheat and barley’.” (Guppy, 155) With the arrival of cinema to Iran, Shusha points out to the desire to look like the Western artists and women, it is no longer of use to look like the women in Persian miniatures but rather like Ingrid Bergman or Hedy Lamarr. (Guppy, 170) Even though being fair-skinned is seen as advantageous, once tanning becomes fashionable and Germans and Swiss also aspire to have brown skin, Iranian women and the Iranian society too begin to love their skin color, according to Shusha. Even though she continuously mentions how important it is to look Western, Shusha never describes her appearance or that of her sister or mother.

Whenever Shusha writes about her country and culture with pride she reverts back to Iran’s history and the traditions that have stayed on since the pre-Islamic times. According to Shusha, one day Iran will celebrate the arrival of spring with antic gatherings and festivities that belong to her only. (Guppy, 199) Shusha also puts great emphasis on Iran’s tradition of alternative medicine, how beneficial it is, and how it is able to present cures to ills that have not been solved by the modern medicine through the anecdotes she shares. Furthermore, according to Shusha, while Westernized Iranians are putting aside the information gathered from traditions, Western medicine is looking to alternative medical therapies for cures. (Guppy, 204)

Shusha’s narrative is also a counter narrative towards the West’s point of view towards the harem. When describing the harem, Shusha does not paint a world deemed powerless by patriarchal culture, but rather a space carved out by women despite the patriarchal pressures. She writes that this is a world inhabited by magicians, fortune-tellers and the

like. According to Shusha, this is where power resides though intrigue, friendships and alliances and formed and broken, political fortunes created or ruined. (Guppy, 15)

For Shusha, seeing the image of many chador-clad women screaming on the streets after the Iranian Revolution, is like a nightmare scene with evil crows from a sci-fi movie. That she sees these women on the streets as evil crows, the darkness and the condescending tone of the words used in this description stand to show Shusha does not feel a sense of sisterhood with these women, and that she is having difficulty ascertaining their motivations. In the following sentence, she writes down;

“‘What has happened to the *women* of Persia?’ they asked in the drawing-rooms of Paris, New York, London... Who knows why and how a virus attacks the collective psyche of a nation?” (Guppy, 124)

Just like the eyes watching Iran from New York, London, Paris, Shusha too is looking at her country now from afar, unable to understand what is going on. That she is confused even though she has been raised there and have criticized the forced modernization efforts of Riza Shah, can stand to show how her ties have been broken with her country, and the traditional family of hers that always steered towards custom rather than modernity. Another important point is Shusha’s feeling of bashfulness towards Western people who look afar at Iran. To Shusha, the revolution not only victimized many people like Shusha but also made the West show them up.

Shusha’s autobiography is written for a Western readership, in English, but through the usage of first person plural and the revelation and catharsis she shares with her mother in the finale, Shusha is able to identify herself with the women around her as well as bring about a collectivist identity. The hometown Shusha leaves in order to see more of the big world vanishes with her departure, and as it becomes a completely different place. Return is impossible and the wound of this loss only begins to heal with the reconstruction of a crowded history and past for Shusha.

## **HANAN AL-SHAYKH – THE LOCUST AND THE BIRD**

### **FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE LOST MOTHER**

Hanan Al Shaykh writes the biography of her mother, “The Locust and The Bird” in Arabic and the book is first published in 2005 in Lebanon. The book is inspired by her mother’s life story and is based on the story as told to Hanan by her mother. In the prologue of the biography, Hanan describes how she had to leave Beirut and the war in Lebanon before she wrote her novel, “Zahra’s Story” with two suitcases, her two year old son and six month old daughter. Her husband is trying to get a job in Saudi Arabia and Hanan is unable to open her suitcases for two months, hoping a return to Lebanon would be possible. (Al Shaykh, 14) Alas, it doesn’t happen. Hanan eventually begins to live in London, creating a life there for herself. And she begins to reconnect with the mother who left her for another man, through writing her life story.

### **Writing – A Rebellious Act**

Hanan writes that when her mother leaves her when she was seven that a voice begins to accompany her. Hanan even believes that it was this voice that gave birth to her. This is the voice that helps her tie her shoes, the voice that makes her hair, the voice that is the reason why she distances her from her father. It is this voice that urges her to leave Beirut and go to college in Egypt. And it is this voice that explains to Hanan the lack of her mother in her home. She also believes that it is this voice that hands her a pen, the same voice that explains why she feels distant from her mother and her new husband while her sister does not share this sentiment. (Al Shaykh, 6) As can be understood from these examples, this voice that gives birth to Hanan symbolizes her breaking away from those around her, it distinguishes her. Her mother gives birth to Hanan and by leaving her husband and marrying another man, she begins to be present in Hanan as a voice. This way, Hanan’s breaking away from her mother also allows for her to internalize her mother. Writing allows Hanan to give life to this voice, and allows for her mother to appear as the voice that has accompanied Hanan all her life through this biography. When

Hanan becomes a journalist, her mother asks her friends to read her Hanan's articles. Because she can't read, she needs help with Hanan's writing. (Al Shaykh, 10) This way writing becomes sounds again, and that sound returns back to the sound that gave birth to Hanan, to source who gave birth to the sound, to the MOTHER.

Writing also helps Hanan, who had to leave her country because of war, to understand the violence in her country and why "Beirut had become a demon playground – a bleak name even for the Lebanese to utter" (Al Shaykh, 14) As Hanan writes, her pen keeps taking her back to the past with her mother.

Through this biography that is written in first person singular, Hanan's mother Kamila, who never got to read or write her entire life, finally able to command written language, despite by proxy of her daughter. Kamila has finally succeeded in possessing written language in a culture and country that has not allowed her the freedom to attend school to learn to read or write.

### **Women's Solidarity**

There are various figures in the narrative that stand up to help Kamila. One of the most important figures is Fatme, whose house presents the setting in which Kamila will meet Muhammad, the love of her life, and her second husband. Kamila's family doesn't allow her to attend school but rather send her to Fatme to get sewing lessons, and Kamila grows to love Fatme. Looking back, she also realizes that the love and compassion Fatme had for her must have probably been because she knew that fate that awaited Kamila. (Al Shaykh, 60) With the arrival of her niece, Miriam to their house, Kamila also remembers how joyous her life became. Just like Fatme, Miriam becomes a supporter and a friend for Kamila. When talking about Miriam, she says; "I felt as though heaven had sent me an angel who would laugh alongside me; someone who would love me as I loved her." (Al Shaykh, 90)

Women who start to shun Kamila because of her choices also find a place in the narrative. The women who Kamila used to have tea with suddenly disappear once she divorces her husband. Kamila does not condone them but rather finds them miserable, despite Kamila they are not in love with their husbands and have to live lives they did not desire. They are victims, unable to reach the color, meaning and love Kamila feels fortunate to have.

### **Mother: A Starting Point**

Hanan al Shaykh chooses the life story of her mother rather than herself and puts her mother in the center of the narrative. This allows her to praise her mother for her fighter spirit against the culture and traditions that imprisoned her; but it also gives her mother a voice through writing. In an interview she gave about this book, Hanan says; “I feel as if her life and essence mock Western stereotypes that obscure, much like the actual veil itself, the face of many an Arab woman. (Rhame, 2009) Hanan’s biographical narrative, like those of the other women writers explored here, is a way of writing against the Western and Middle Eastern prejudices against Middle Eastern women.

Hanan’s novel begins at her daughter’s wedding ceremony. Her daughter is about to get married without a bridal gown, or a wedding party. This similarity reminds Hanan of her own mother. Just when she writes about her mother’s wedding, she corrects herself. “No, I cannot call it that. It was the day on which she was sacrificed.” (Al Shaykh, 4) Hanan’s mother Kamila was forced to marry at a very young age, and hence never had a wedding. Unlike Kamila, Hanan and her daughter marry out of love but opt out of a wedding nonetheless. The autobiography begins by drawing a parallel between Hanan and her mother like this. Hanan never describes how it could have been like when Muhammad and Kamila got married. This gives the feeling that Kamila’s second marriage, which was to a man she fiercely loved – could have likewise been an occasion that was not marked by a celebration. Hanan, her mother and her daughter do not celebrate marriage, which is a patriarchal institution with a big party, but rather see it for the procedure, which it makes their lives easier. Thus Hanan provides an identification with her mother right

from the beginning, also extending this identification to contain her daughter. Hanan and her daughter become carriers of an inheritance that goes against patriarchal traditions, embracing a collectivist identity.

Hanan sees her own marriage as her mother's victory. According to Hanan, she is able to show everyone who said that because of their humble backgrounds and her mother's choices that they would never be able to get married. That Hanan begins her novel not with her own marriage but with that of her daughter can be seen as an attempt at drawing parallels. Hanan continues to draw parallels throughout the biography. In the prologue section, after Hanan writes that her mother left home after falling in love with a man, she starts to talk about how she too is not cut out for marriage, as she is too free and independent for the institution. (Al Shaykh, 5) She covers up the loss she felt when she was a child of her mother with this similarity. Her mother left them when they were young but Hanan was still able to become like her mother.

Although Kamila repeatedly asks Hanan to write her life story, Hanan seems reluctant at first. She writes that she feared her mother would bewitch her, that like others before her Hanan would begin to believe everything Kamila said. For Hanan knows very well why Kamila wants Hanan to tell her story. Her mother seeks forgiveness. (Al Shaykh, 17)

Hanan begins her mother's life story right when Kamila's father has left Kamila, her mother, her brother. Kamila's father has fallen in love with someone else, left his home and married this woman. (Al Shaykh, 21) Beginning the story at this exact moment allows for the reader to see an identification with Kamila and her father. What is special about Kamila's story is that once she has two kids, she will do exactly what her father did when she was small. The choice her father makes effects Kamila's life, setting in motion the events that will lead to Kamila making the same choice as her fathers, thus the biography being written. Brokenhearted by the departure of her father, Kamila eventually breaks the heart of her daughter when she leaves her. Hanan begins the biography right here, where she can most identify with the heartache of her mother. Because she too has felt that way.

Hanan builds Kamila's departure from Nabatiyeh where she led a poor but happy life with her brother and mother as a departure from Kamila's mother figure as well. Kamila and her mother used to sleep together in Nabatiyeh and continue to do so in Beirut but once in Beirut, Kamila has lost the warmth of her mother. Kamila dreams of having stayed in Nabatiyeh as there her mother only belonged to her and her brother. (Al Shaykh, 41) The tragedy stemming from the departure of the mother foreshadows to the reader the struggles that lie ahead for Kamila.

Even though Kamila remains angry at her mother for the traumas she has put her through, as she begins to age, she mellows down in her attitude towards her mother. After Kamila loses Muhammad, her second husband and love, she remembers that her mother too lost her first husband when she was her age. (Al Shaykh, 217) This similarity almost frightens Kamila, for it allows for her to identify with the mother she had long been emotionally separated from.

Kamila asks for forgiveness from her mother when her mother dies. As her mother is being buried, she forgives her mother for marrying her so young, she knows it is the only life known to her mother. (Al Shaykh, 231) Towards the end of the biography, Hanan and Kamila visit Nabatiyeh. There, Kamila feels Hanan finally accepts Kamila as her mother, accepting that it was she who brought her into life. (Al Shaykh, 267) As Kamila nears the end, Hanan, just like Kamila did with her own mother, reaches a point where she can forgive her mother.

As they return to Beirut, Kamila begins to cry. Hanan tells her not to cry, that she loves her, Kamila asks her if she loves Kamila even though she deserted her. Hanan assures her it doesn't matter, that Kamila had to leave her father. Kamila continues to cry and suddenly Hanan begins to cry as well. She looks at Kamila and tells her that she's crying not because she was deserted as a child, but because every time her mother tries to speak classical Arabic, she remembers that she was never given a chance. "If you only knew how to read and write." Hanan laments, "You, not me, would be the writer!" (Al Shaykh,

272) This underlines Hanan's wound, it hurts her that her mother could never possess written language. As Hanan is able to identify with her mother, she looks in the mirror to see that the pen she's holding has been robbed from her mother.

After writing down Kamila's life story, Hanan learns that her mother has cancer. Kamila has poured everything out to Hanan and thus is relieved. Hanan fears that maybe that is why she got cancer, and feels guilty for giving her this relief. After the death of her mother, Hanan thanks her for carrying her in her tiny womb, for providing her with her name and character. (Al Shaykh, 290) With the name she gave her daughter, Kamila was able to surpass the boundaries given to her, and hence reach written language despite the hardships.

### **Mother of a Daughter**

Kamila mentions the power she receives after falling pregnant with her first child. During her pregnancy she can sleep at night without fear, eat whatever she wants, go wherever she likes and watch movies. (Al Shaykh, 97) Being pregnant also means her husband won't be calling her to stay with him. With the birth of her daughter, Kamila grows even more powerful.

To Kamila, her first daughter Fatima is like the toys she never had the chance to play with. Even though she really likes playing with her, her family takes care of the little girl, unsure if Kamila can do it by herself. After the birth of Kamila, despite the attention she receives, Kamila never forgets the night Fatima was conceived, how her husband mounted on her as if she was "a small donkey" (Al Shaykh, 100) Hanan Al Shaykh ends this section titled "The Locust and The Bird" with this powerful statement. The big sister she was always envious of because of her relationship with her mother, has gotten into the life of her mother whose lack she always resented, with this trauma. Hanan is going through the exact thing she wrote she feared at the beginning of the novel, as she writes about her father's rape of her mother, and the wound inflicted on her mother in such open terms. This is where she begins to understand and forgive her mother.

Kamila's second daughter, the author of this novel, Hanan comes into this world in much different terms. After having sex with Muhammad for the first time, Kamila is scared that she might be pregnant so she has sex with her husband as well. Upon learning of Kamila's second pregnancy, Muhammad tries to kill himself with a gun. Kamila takes the gun away and they both start to cry. When explaining their sorrow, she writes, "I assumed we cried for the same reason: I was going to give birth to a baby that was half his, in my husband's home." (Al Shaykh, 132) Hanan, the author of the book, finds herself as Kamila's daughter from both Muhammad and her husband. In this way, she is included in the relationship she always felt she was excluded from, Kamila and Muhammad's relationship, as both the provider of written language and a story.

### **A Women Rebelling Against Patriarchy**

Kamila finds new ways to deal with her trauma. Despite the insistences of her husband, she refuses to do housework or learn how to cook. (Al Shaykh, 87) Some other day, her husband chides her in front of everyone for drinking a yogurt drink and puts the bowl of yoghurt up high. Outraged at how she's been treated, Kamila makes herself another yoghurt drink, pouring the rest down her face and goes into the living room. The husband, shocked as to what he can do against an act of such rebellion just begins to say a prayer. Kamila realizes that her husband could not understand that this was her way of taking revenge from him. (Al Shaykh, 88) For Kamila, pouring the yoghurt on her face becomes a way of surviving with dignity in this instance.

As she feels stiffened by her surroundings, Kamila tries to assert her individuality through the valuable things she buys. Kamila's big brother hits Kamila when he learns that she's been stealing from her husband. At the anger and helplessness she feels, she pours down the gasoline over her, and grabs a box of matches, ready to light herself on fire. Her uncle takes away the matches and Kamila begins to cry incessantly, secretly relieved the matches were taken from her. It also makes her feel happy and powerful to have scared her big brother. (Al Shaykh, 110) By doing this, she asserts her right on the

body that was stolen from her, especially after her brother's hitting her, she can feel powerful again. Likewise, after her affair with Muhammad is exposed and she is trapped in her own home, Kamila finds herself on the edge of a cliff outside Beirut. She contemplates killing herself, so that her husband and her family can feel guilty and ashamed. When talking about that moment she says "I wanted to die so I could be free." (Al Shaykh, 162) The mere act of having thought about it makes her feel powerful and in control again.

Kamila is deeply disturbed by some of the women's helpless attitudes in the movies Kamila watches. In one of the movies, Nawal commits suicide because of love. This hurts Kamila profoundly. Why has she not tried to reason with her love, thrown tantrums? At this moment Kamila promises herself to always stay powerful and not let sorrow get the better of her. (Al Shaykh, 125) Throughout her life story, Kamila finds the strength in her whenever she is knocked down. When finally after all her hardships she is able to marry Muhammad, Kamila begins to sing. She feels like Leila in that movie, she is free. Now, just like her own mother once did, she can sleep between her both children. (Al Shaykh, 176)

After her divorce and her subsequent second marriage, Kamila goes to her daughters' school to get the permission of the head mistress to see her daughters there. Upon hearing Kamila's story, the mistress congratulates her, telling her she's a very brave person. To Kamila, this word "brave" becomes a source of great joy. Before her divorce from her first husbands, the words that were used to describe her had been of little gravity, words like selfish. However, brave makes her feel good, it makes her feel powerful. (Al Shaykh, 180) By going against the patriarchal system that imprisoned her, and the family that enabled this, she is able to gain an identity she is happy with. This word will also help heal Kamila's wounds. Kamila had known that the system had not been on her side, so it is a great deal to have won the word "brave" within that system. As the system remains flawed, since Kamila notes that everyone is so busy with the scandal of Kamila and Muhammad that no one is interested in the scandal a fourteen year old child being forcefully married to her old widowed uncle. (Al Shaykh, 181)

### **A Limbo Between Home and the Street**

The street has an interesting place in Kamila's story. The street gains importance once in Beirut, not back in Nabatiyeh. Once Kamila comes to Beirut, her uncle Hussein (who will later become her husband) asks her to sell plastic children's bibs by going door to door. In one of the homes she visits, the woman who answers the door can't believe that a girl so young could be sent to do this, and after purchasing everything she's selling, she warns her to take care of herself and if a man answers the door, to run away. When Kamila comes home she tells her mother this story, whining why nobody warned her about this before. She wants to go to school anyway. (Al Shaykh, 43) The street symbolizes her difference from other kids, and the lack she will constantly feel of the school. Despite its grand geography, the street reminds Kamila of how restricted her space is in the world. Because the street, is not the school.

When Kamila meets Muhammad and enters puberty, the street then becomes a way of breaking taboos and rules, and widening her life. After her relationship with Muhammad is exposed, and she is forbidden from leaving the house, she escapes anyway. While doing this, she says she knew the risks but didn't care. (Al Shaykh, 149) This way, the street that used to underline her lack, becomes a possibility of dreams becoming true.

### **Father: An Image of the Street and Success**

Hanan al-Shaykh provides a character list in the beginning of the biography. In this list, she writes down "my mother" next to Kamila's name. None of the other characters in novel are signified by their relationship to Hanan. What's more, even though Hanan points out to her mother by saying "my", across her father Abu-Hussein she only writes down "Kamila's brother in-law through his first marriage to Manifa and later her husband". (Al Shaykh, *Dramatis Personae*) She also puts in parenthesis the name, Haji. There is no indication that she is Hanan's father. This way Hanan puts a distance between herself and the family that put Kamila through hell. She makes the reader realize that she

will not be going into a confrontation with her father. This biography will help Hanan reconnect with her mother, take her voice with her, look at the mirror to see her mother.

Hanan briefly mentions her father in the prologue and states that her father was closer to God than Hanan and her sister, and he constantly prayed with a scared look on her face. As her father trembled before God, Hanan became more and more bold towards him. (Al Shaykh, 6) Other than this brief explanation about him, Hanan never mentions her father again. The reader thus realizes that Hanan's identification and construction of identity will not involve her father.

A conflict arises every time Kamila talks about her father. Kamila makes a decision that is very similar to her father, she leaves her first husband and children behind. So when her first husband is angry at her for not handling household chores, she says it must not have been her youth but rather her character that was very similar to her father, that was the culprit why she wasn't good at housework. Kamila believes that she inherited her father's nature and character. People around her keep telling her that she looks exactly like her father, too. (Al Shaykh, 87) Kamila identifies not with the traditional mother who forcefully marries her teenage daughter but rather with her father who was free to make the choices he wanted to live the life he desired.

### **The Mother's Distance to a Native and Foreign Language**

Hanan al Shaykh's novel where she wrote the autobiography of her mother can be seen as her gift of (written) language to her mother. Kamila's illiteracy comes up again and again throughout the autobiography. When writing about Kamila's childhood, or when Kamila has had children of her, Kamila keeps on lamenting the fact that she could never learn to read or write. Having gone to school, or the chance to go to school (and to learn to read and write) begins to symbolize to Kamila the life she could never have.

When she moves to Beirut with her brother and mother, she keeps looking at the students on the streets, wishing to be like them. She dreams of sitting on a school desk wearing

their shoes and dresses. (Al Shaykh, 44) She also dreams of living with the men and women she sees on the films she watches. Those people in the dreams seem very different from Kamila; as she believes that unlike her, they surely have gone to school. (Al Shaykh, 52)

All her life, Kamila looks for other ways to beat the distance she feels to written language. One of these examples can be seen in the woman she sees and wants to be like in the film, *The White Rose*. Kamila believes if her name was not Kamila, which means perfect, but Warda, which means rose, she could have easily been like the people whose lives and fates she admired. (Al Shaykh, 50) Giving something a name is a way to rule over it. Since there is no way for her to change her name, she tries to gain control by giving her second sister a name she wants. With the name she gives Hanan, Kamila hopes to provide her with a wider world than her own. This is powerful, as with her first daughter Fatima, she had actually wanted the name Raja or Samira but was rejected by her husband. (Al Shaykh, 100)

Always embarrassed about not knowing how to read or write, after losing her second husband, Kamila is presented with a form she has to sign. Mortified, she realizes that she has forgotten how to sign her name. When the official tells her she could use her fingerprint, she remembers the helpless women back in her village and refuses. Instead, she draws the bird and the rose, which she used to draw in letters she wrote Muhammad, saying this, would be her signature. (Al Shaykh, 216) She thus takes revenge from a system that spared her the education and written language she wanted, by creating a language of her own and signing with it.

Even though she doesn't know how to read or write, Kamila is very talented in language and literature. This is emphasized especially when Muhammad comes into her life. She sings Muhammad a song when they first meet and impressed with the words, Muhammad can't believe she wrote the song in her mind. (Al Shaykh, 65) Once when Muhammad sends her the lyrics of a Ummu Gulsum song, and Fatme reads the letter, Kamila is

joyous to find out that he wrote the names of the lyricist and composer. This shows that he sees her as a peer, as someone who would want to learn the source. (Al Shaykh, 165)

### **Political Awakening and Stance**

Kamila knows that after coming to Beirut and starting to live with her big sister and her husband's house, her life has completely changed. When she realizes her attempts at going to school will yield no result, Kamila understands that even though she is very little, the only way for her to survive is by taking care of herself. (Al Shaykh, 44)

Lebanon's political history can be read throughout the biography of Kamila. When Lebanon is in political transformation, about to leave being a French mandate behind, Kamila meets Muhammad who is extremely excited. Kamila on the other hand, wishes for the demonstrations to continue so she can keep on seeing Muhammad easily. (Al Shaykh, 130) Hanan does not try to hide or excuse her mother's political apathy here. The country for which Kamila should care, has already traumatized Kamila with its traditions.

Years later, Hanan reads the journals of her mother's second husband, Muhammad, finding out that Muhammad was a very political individual. She thinks that Muhammad belonged to a generation that believed in politics, pan-Arabism, in the country and freedom. She finds it fortunate that Muhammad was not alive to see what Lebanon became during the way, and that all his children began to live in exile. (Al Shaykh, 300)

Kamila begins to go through financial troubles after the death of her second husband whom she loved fiercely. When trying to get her pension, she realizes there are other widows like her, going through similar troubles. She then decides to found the Widow's Club to help and support women like them. They let divorced or single women join the club eventually, and the club becomes a place where women who don't want to be a burden to their families meet up. (Al Shaykh, 244)

## **Exile**

When the civil war in Lebanon gains force, Kamila has to take her smallest child Muhammad Kamal and leave. Together, they go to San Diego where most of Kamila's kids live. Even though Kamila loves it there as she finds it very similar in nature and climate to Beirut, she eventually begins to feel isolated, lonely and helpless. In Beirut she could ask anyone and anything for help, even a wall. (Al Shaykh, 258)

When the war in Lebanon is finally over, Kamila has the opportunity to return to her country after having gone back and forth Kuwait and the US. She is finally in Beirut but her children are scattered all around the world, exiled from their mother, culture and motherland because of the war. The war that took sixteen years to end has effected Kamila as well, changing her into an aggressive, remorseful woman. (Al Shaykh, 259)

Upon her return from exile, Kamila realizes being in Beirut is making her even more edgy. The past keeps popping up on her door, making her feel guilty all over again. She feels like she is becoming her mother, and starts to think about the pain she has caused her mother, Hanan and Fatima. This is how the idea of a confrontation with Hanan comes about. She feels as though her skin is thinning, her face is getting smoother as she tells Hanan the details of her life. (Al Shaykh, 263) Kamila does not have the luxury of a catharsis that could be achieved by writing. But she gets this luxury by proxy of her writer daughter. She gets the opportunity to make a clean copy of her life, and choose the adjectives she desires when re-constructing her identity in writing.

## **Mirrors and First Person Singular**

Just like other women in this dissertation, Hanan Al Shaykh's protagonist, Kamila's relationship with mirrors reflects her place in society and the pressures she feels in a patriarchal structure. Kamila remembers that her mother was anxious about everything after the death of Kamila's second husband and her worst fear was Kamila's youthful desires. Whenever Kamila's mother sees Kamila in front of a mirror, she tries to stop her.

(Al Shaykh, 228) Kamila looks for ways throughout the biography for ways of telling her story and the her situation of imprisonment but this proves very difficult. She thus rebels by turning towards herself. She cares about her appearance, likes to dress up, doesn't abstain from stealing from her husband in order to buy clothes and accessories. She regains the mirror that was stolen from her in this way, and never gives up her relationship with mirrors.

Hanan begins the novel with a prologue and ends the book in an epilogue and two last chapters where she writes about the death of her mother, the effect this had on her, Muhammad's writing and how impressive it was to her that someone like Muhammad who was so into writing, could fall in love with her mother who could neither write nor read. Hanan uses first person singular throughout the biography, as she conveys her mother's voice. She confesses that when she began to write the biography, Hanan tried to tell the story herself, being the protagonist the novel but stops in the first sentence. She does not want the novel to carry her own voice, she believes it should be written in her mother's voice, with her own heartbeat, worries, dreams and nightmares. That her mother would have preferred that. In the last page of the novel, Hanan asserts that it was not she but her mother who wrote the book. According to Hanan, Kamila opened her wings, and Hanan was the wind that took her places. (Al Shaykh, 302) Although Hanan's name is stated as the author, Hanan asserts her mother's authorship in the last sentence as a gift to her illiterate mother.

### **Womanhood, Appearance and Sexuality**

Just like in Nawal El Saadawi, Hanan Al Shayk's story of Kamila also puts an emphasis on Kamila's first period. In the section titled 'A Single Drop of Blood', Hanan writes about the time Kamila had her first period. Kamila sees a drop of blood on her underwear, fearing she is about to die but soon finds out she wasn't wrong. For Kamila, that drop of blood is an alarm bell. (Al Shaykh, 71) It is a signifier of things to come, traumas to face, and a death, and rebirth.

Blood as a symbol resurfaces once Kamila's forced marriage and rape by her uncle. After she is raped by this man who is now considered her husband, 13 year old Kamila is covered in blood as she lays down next to her mother, crying. She says that she made no attempt at making sure her mother's nightgown didn't get any blood. When remembering that evening she says, "I was truly slaughtered and the blood on the white dress was the proof." (Al Shaykh, 85) She makes it known that she will not overlook her mother's accomplice in this trauma. She has bled because of the trauma she experienced, lain next to her mother for her to see, and now her mother's nightgown is covered in the blood that was the result of her wrongdoing. Hanan Al Shaykh, when writing about the rape of her 13 year old mother by her father, decides to end the section right here. As the blood-clad Kamila is deserted by her own mother.

The period blood that symbolizes Kamila's puberty also symbolizes the trauma and nightmare she is about to endure. Fatma Alzinger, in her article *Exile and What is Traumatic in Exile* (original: *Sürgün ve Sürgünde Travmatik Olan*), writes that puberty is a second individualization period. (Alzinger, 2014) The teenager feels the desire to be independent from the mother, as well as the fear of being away from the mother at the same time and this proves a challenge, according to Alzinger. Kamila finds out that her mother was involved in the plot to marry her to her old uncle at right this moment. As the aunt (and Hanan's father) rapes Kamila right after her period, Kamila's individualization process becomes even faster. Kamila will no longer feel like a member of a group that put her through this ordeal. In the Personality List at the beginning of the novel, Hanan does not specify how the characters are related to her. The only person she does this specification for is Kamila, and this points to a similar individualization and distinction desire. Hanan too does not feel like a member of the culture and group that had a hand in traumatizing her mother. She has already left the country where these took place, and she writes from a place that is far away from that people. This allows for her to identify with her mother and her siblings, and to create a crowded, collectivist identity still. She also dedicates the book to her siblings. This way, she has identified with those who were not culprits, those who were hurt but not broken.

Hanan al Shaykh puts an end to the conflict with her mother by writing her autobiography. Her mother Kamila was brave enough to escape a home that traumatized her, and build a new life with a man she loved. When Hanan understands the scope of her mother's trauma, she realizes that her mother didn't abandon her but rather abandoned the cage that imprisoned her mother. By the help of this biography, Kamila is able to assert herself as a fighter, and Hanan is able to show Western and Eastern readers that like her mother, the Middle East is ripe with stories of women who fight patriarchal structures regardless of the difficulties that might arise.

## CONCLUSION

Unlike women writers who have never been forced into exile by circumstance, the women writers who write in exile are also in an eager attempt to re-configure their home and to determine their subsequent identities in those homes. They not only harbor memories of oppression from their homelands but are anxious about losing the memories they had there, just like they lost their motherland. Although they are all accomplished women in Western countries, rather than writing about the makings of their success, they all return to their childhoods, the stifling, engaging, infuriating and comforting habitats they were raised in. Although autobiography, in the Western sense, asks for the author to see herself as a separate entity from the outside, the Middle Eastern women writers who have struggled with the trauma of the loss of the motherland, mother tongue and the mother, return back to her figure to re-build their identity. They include the approval of their fathers in their autobiographies, for it is not in the eyes of the Western peoples they seek the proof of their success, but in the minds of the fathers they lost, fathers that were tradition, fathers that were both the patriarchy as well as a crack in patriarchy that allowed for the women in these autobiographies to find their own way in the culture they inhabited.

Jale Parla, in her article *My History is My Nightmare! Dream, Nightmare, Room and Writing in Women Novelists (Tarihçem Kabusumdur! Kadın Romancılar da Rüya, Kabus, Oda, Yazı)* points out that narratives written by women novelists and that have female

protagonists in Turkey end in ways that are against how the female protagonist wished to have her progress finalized. Parla writes about how Bildungsroman theorists believe it would be inconsistent with the nature of such novels as these novels follow the development and revelation the individual, and delve in the conflict between the individual and the society. Parla writes it would be unrealistic for women who try to better themselves in such cultures to get out victoriously, after they realized they've been severely hurt or once they tried to question their lives. (Parla, 2004) However, the women writers in this dissertation aren't on a quest for a happy ending. Far from it, because they all had to go into exile and live there, to build a new life for themselves in exile, these women feel a sense of victory for having been able to become individualized in Middle Eastern cultures. Yes, they have all lost their mothers, motherlands and mother tongues. They have been exposed to more heartache and hardships just because they were women. Regardless, they were all able to overcome these and find their live stories written, have their voices heard, and never gave up on their writing or struggle.

The women writers in this dissertation don't look at their countries through a nostalgic dream window; they instead build their novels as a way of rebelling against a system that has exiled them. All the authors in this dissertation are very well aware that their births as girls meant more struggle for them and their families. Nawal El Saadawi believes that a silence took over with her birth; Shusha Guppy asks her father if he would have preferred to have a boy; Hanan Al Shaykh's mother dreams of being a film star, believing they belong to a different world as they've gone to school. Zainab Salbi's mother has to take bigger risks and send her daughter away to make sure she can protect her daughter from Saddam.

In all these life narratives, writing is situated as a way of rebelling. It becomes a way for them to refuse the fates handed to them and thus their interest in literature also becomes a dangerous interest. They use writing both as a way of defining themselves, as well as way of finding again the crowds they have lost. In this regard, they make sure that women whose voices aren't heard, are heard in their biographical narratives. That their power, character, colors and identities don't get lost in the wind. Shusha Guppy talks about her

aunt who is a master storyteller, as well as talking about the modernized women's lives before the revolution. Nawal el Saadawi mentions how powerful village women can be, how they do much more than the men in villages. Zainab Salbi opens her autobiography for the writings of her mother, whom she adores and sees as her hero. Hanan Al Shaykh writes the biography of her illiterate mother, opening her a space where she can choose the words used to describe her.

In all the autobiographical narratives, the mother figure carries humongous importance, these narratives can be seen as a way for the authors to reconnect with their mother. All the authors in this dissertation have already lost their mothers when they're writing their autobiographies. Writing about their mothers, and redefining their relationships with their mothers thus becomes a cathartic experience for them. It allows for them to come closer to the symbolic and physical being of the mothers they have lost. By writing, Zainab Salbi is able to let go of her anger towards her mother and understand her. Nawal el Saadawi can identify with her mother when she gives birth to a daughter and in the end of the novel, through going back to Cairo, she is able to come back to her mother. Shusha Guppy stays clear of analyzing her relationship with her mother but in the finale of her novel she describes deserting her country (and by proxy, her mother) as a cowardly act, saying her entire life will revolve around trying to find her mother's warmth again. Hanan Al Shaykh gains the ability to forgive her mother who left her when she was young, only through writing the traumas her mother has lived through. These women return to writing as a way of rioting, and redefine their experiences with their mothers in this light.

In contrast, the relationships these women have with their fathers aren't in need of a confrontation or aren't colored with conflict (except for Kamila's and Hanan's). The father is a figure found in political and social spheres, and thus as they put a distance between themselves and traditional women's roles, they are able to do so with their identification with their fathers. For Shusha Guppy, Zainab Salbi and Nawal El Saadawi, even for Hanan Al Shaykh who writes about the trauma put towards her mother by her father, the father is always a loving figure. Their being a girl does not result in an injury

or damage in the relationships they have with their father. When writing about their love and praise of their fathers, they remain open. Their fathers are usually the figures who give them approval in their professional ambitions, and take as role models in political awakenings.

Political turmoil usually corresponds to the political awakenings that take place in these women, usually after their puberty. With these political fluctuations, and awakenings, these women break free from their states and usually culture and countries. Exile underlines this political awakening as it keeps them away from their mother tongue, motherland and usually their mothers. Ayça Gürdal Küey writes in her article, *Exile, Time that Stops (Sürgün: Geçmeyen Zaman)* that she has always thought of exile as the first separation from the mother, as separating from the mother, separating from the mother tongue. (Küey, 2014) All the women writers in this dissertation return to their relationship with the mother in order to deal better with the isolation imposed by exile. Exile reminds the individual of the first breaking away with the mother, underlines the separation of the symbiotic relationship. Written and spoken language that signifies the separation from the mother, becomes the way to reunite with the mother, and carries with it the hope of analogically going back to the womb.

As displacement, migration and exile continues to be present in today's world, looking at the exiled writers' autobiographic narratives help better understand the different dynamics that play at constructing of new identities. As political unrest refuses to subside, what does it mean for a woman to have been separated from her country? What does it mean for her to write about her experiences? It becomes of utmost importance to allow for women from Middle Eastern countries (and various other war-ravaged territories) to tell their stories to find commonalities in the human experience. It is also important to realize that breaking away from one's country and culture results in an isolation that can be ameliorated through discussions of the past, identity and the future.

In the end, exile remains to be a present reality. Writers from different cultures will continue to return to writing as a remedy. Writing, by nature is a lonely act that requires

concentration, and for this reason allows for identification the most. Individuals who have had to experience the isolation in their identity and the forced individualization, will continue to write to regain the referentiality they feel they have lost. In a changing world, women will continue to tell their own stories of freedom, struggle and breaking free and will thus be able to identify and rebuild their relationships with their mother figures. As the mother becomes a symbol not only of the home but of the street, daughters will also identify with their mothers more easily, rather than looking at the open wounds to realize that the image they have been looking at in the mirror, already had a likening to the wounded mother they remember.

Exile will remain to be a sorrowful incident, women will break free from their forced identities with exile and form new identities, but they will also keep holding on to the identities they have formed with great difficulty in their home countries. But the world will only be a better place once people who have never been exiled read these autobiographic narratives written in exile, and understand the trauma it implies...

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