The American University in Cairo
The School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Narrative and Antinarrative:
Resisting Oppression in Selected Works
Of Toni Morrison and Salwa Bakr

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Comparative Literature

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Master of Arts

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Under the supervision of Dr. Amy Motlagh
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I wish to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my mother who taught me how to be strong enough to pursue my dreams and never to give up.

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ABSTRACT

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By Nermine Sergius

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The thesis aims at exploring the relationship between narratology and psychology through discussing literary works that belong to African American and Egyptian literatures. The two different worlds of Toni Morrison and Salwa Bakr share some social features including the formation of what is antinarratable which comes as a result of social constraints on what is "appropriate" to narrate. Those constraints are defined by a hegemonic discourse that gives itself the right to construct the grand narrative as the only "true" story and the other narratives as antinarratable.

The antinarratable area becomes larger, as far as women are concerned, in patriarchal societies. Some of those women resist such repression either through resorting to fantasy, hysterical narrative, or a healing narrative. This latter needs a support of an understanding group that would piece together the fragmented traumatic narrative and contribute to make the act of narrating a trauma a healing process.

Both Toni Morrison and Salwa Bakr take a common trajectory towards revealing the antinarratable in their respective works. They both resist the rigidity of the social conditions forced upon women in their societies and simultaneously deconstruct the fixity of the classic literary traditions through creating and recreating new literary mediums free of prejudices.

Table of Contents

Introduction …………………………………………………………………………..2

Chapter 1 The Return of the Repressed Narrative: Antinarrative as Hysterical

Narrative and Fantasy…………… ………………………..………… 8

Chapter 2 Narrative as a Healing Process ……………..…………………..…..….28

Conclusion……………………………………………………………………...50

Works Cited …………………………………………………………………….53

Introduction

"Where there is power there is resistance."
-Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

"Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives."
-Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*

Resistance, for some women in certain societies, is an ongoing process. It is resistance against social conditions that shape the boundaries of their narratives, resulting in a growing area of antinarrative that would ultimately compel them to silence and restrain them from forming new counternarratives of their own. [1] Moreover, it is a resistance against being designated for fixed social roles that impede their creativity and independence. Finally it is a resistance against representing, or misrepresenting, a purely constructed image in which women are typical "Others" who are lesser parties in every possible way.

Those women who struggle for their individuality by rejecting silence and refusing to follow hegemonic ideologies often face social challenges that may lead to psychological trauma. They either conquer such challenges or evade them through entering into a world of fantasy and denial. In both cases they resist, and whether their resistance results in enhancing their social conditions or not, they persist in their efforts even if this means

[1] According to Robyn R. Warhol the antinarratable involves a personal traumatic experience and revealing it is considered a social taboo. The counternarrative, on the other hand stands against the grand narrative that control the discourse with smaller narratives which not necessarily carry trauma or violate a social taboo. In his different studies about postmodernism, Ihab Hassan argues that narrative/*grande histoire* in Modernism stands in contrast with antinarrative/*petite histoire* in postmodernism (121). The antinarrative, then, can be considered a sort of counternarrative as both represent resistance against the imposed social rules and dominant discourse.

merely scribbling down their thoughts while on the verge of insanity, hoping that someone will read their stories one day. Indeed, the experience of resistance has to be shared with others in order to become effective.

Counternarrative, then, plays a vital role in resisting the hegemony of grand narrative. The very act of narrating is in fact an act of resisting the antinarratable that was formed in the minds of many since their early childhood. Women writers find in the act of narrating an effective mode of resistance that can function as an inspiration to other women to resist the systematic constraints forced on their voices. Narrative to those women writers can become a therapeutic act, but more importantly, it helps them, along with their readers, to understand the world they live in and their past and their present; and to resist the injustices in it by countering them.

Through their works, Toni Morrison and Salwa Bakr encourage acts of resistance against society's rigidity. They both seek to set their fellow women free from the confines of the fixity of ideas and values, encouraging them to develop an independent identity of their own through breaking the boundaries of the antinarrative that were forced upon them. Their very act of writing is the example they set for their readers to resist the silence imposed on their voices, to cease dreading the hegemony of one grand narrative, and to bravely question the taboos their societies specify.

Morrison and Bakr follow a common trajectory in revealing the antinarrative through different creative techniques that simultaneously deconstruct the classic literary traditions against which they posit their narratives. Through this revelation via narrative, they create a literary space where marginalized women come to the center with their smaller counternarratives. The voices and presences of both authors are usually enunciated

through one or more of the characters that play an important role in encouraging other traumatized characters to go through a healing process through narrative (as the case in *Paradise* and *The Golden Chariot*), or that help the reader to understand the dynamics of her society through narrating a past experience (as Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* and Patricia in *Paradise*). Morrison and Bakr then exist inside the text standing behind certain characters that they choose as their representatives.

A healing narrative requires support. Both writers represent the idea of a sisterhood that provides support and validation while helping the traumatized individuals to reintegrate into an alternative social entity which replaces the family that failed them in the past. This sisterhood, while not claiming to be a utopian society, readily eliminates the elements of class and race. The traumatized person ultimately becomes part of this alternative society, ready to support and inspire others in her turn. The sisterhood formed between the women in the Convent, in *Paradise,* or between the women in prison, in *The Golden Chariot*, represents an alternative to their real families. These new societies encourage them to unburden themselves through narrating their traumas instead of forcing them to repress them because of social conventions. The marginalization of these women and their remoteness from the center gives them the chance to become free to narrate.

In other works, such as *The Bluest Eye*, the narrator seeks validation for her narrative from the readers themselves. The narrator in that case represents the author, who wishes the reader to take part in her work and become an active recipient. The healing that occurs in some of the characters through revealing their traumas encourages the reader into going through a similar act of revealing the antinarrative. The reader cannot experience a complete healing unless she goes through the same experience of narrating her

antinarrative and similarly finds support from a certain social group such as family, friends, or alternatively a sisterhood that may understand the gravity of her experience.

The terms "antinarratable" and "antinarrative" have been articulated in different ways over the last three decades. [2] Robyn R. Warhol's definition of the term as "transgression [of] social laws or taboos" combines a feminist approach with narratology (224). Her definition corresponds to Judith Herman's psychological explanation of the difficulty of narrating trauma: "certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word unspeakable" (*Trauma*, 1). The common point between narratology and psychology in this context is in approaching trauma: the difficulties of narrating trauma, and the possibilities of breaking the deeply rooted social rules that define what is appropriate to tell. Evidently both authors agree that to speak the unspeakable is the only way for a healing to occur.

One of the main goals of this thesis is to examine the relationship between narratology and psychology by focusing on the narrative techniques that are revealed through the character's state of mind; in other words, analyzing how the author combines the methodologies of attention to both disciplines in order to represent the true psychological suffering of her characters. Simultaneously, I want to examine how the author defies the

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[2] In 1978 Seymour Chatman coined the term "antinarrative" and defined it as "calls into question . . [the] narrative logic" he sees the term as those works that contravene the traditional narrative that follows a chronological and logical order (57). In 1988 Gerald Prince coined the term "non-narratable" or "unnarratable. He defines it as ''that which, according to a given narrative, cannot be narrated or is not worth narrating either because it transgresses a law (social, authorial, generic, formal (or because it defies the powers of a particular narrator or those of any narrator) or because it falls below the so-called threshold of narratability (it is not sufficiently unusual or problematic)''(1). I am using the term "antinarrative" based on the definitions of Chatman, Prince, Warhol, and Ihab Hassan. Thus the antinarrative in my thesis refers to a way of narrating different stories that defy both the social constraints and at the same time the literary traditions.

tyranny of the socially constructed antinarrative through the genre of novel, allowing for a number of features that defies a grand narrative.

This thesis tries to answer questions such as: what mostly motivate a woman writer to write, how the counternarrative and antinarrative are formed and how they are resisted, moreover how narrative could be transferred to a healing process, and finally, how narratology must combine elements of psychology in order to represent a true psychological state of the characters and their struggle in revealing trauma.

According to the studies of Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, repressed narrative returns in different shapes. [3] In Chapter One, I argue that repressed trauma returns in three different shapes; fantasy, hysterical narrative, or fragmented / emotional narrative that could have healed the narrator if the appropriate conditions were attainable. The power of the antinarrative is also discussed and I argue that if the antinarrative is too oppressive to allow the subject to narrate her trauma, the repressed experiences then return, taking the shape of either a hysterical narrative or a fantasy. These repressed shapes resist the antinarrative but cannot heal the subject because they are solitary acts that lack validation from a supportive other. In this case the subject will either remain locked forever in her fantasy, or stay on the threshold of healing without completely achieving it.

In Chapter Two, I approach narrative as a healing device. Here I highlight the proper conditions which turn narrative into a healing process. A traumatized narrative would be both fragmented and emotional and in need for someone to gather its pieces together to form a legible story. It also needs a supportive listener who plays the role of a psychiatrist that gives validation and support. A narrative without supportive listeners cannot heal the

[3] The concept of "the return of the repressed" was introduced by Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria*. Later Freud discussed the term more elaborately in his essay “Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defense” (1896).

narrator. The listener is either a character that usually represents the authorial voice, or the readers themselves, who the writer seeks to involve in her story as the case with Claudia MacTeer.

Morrison and Bakr choose to resist the silence through narrative. For them and for their characters and readers, narrative means resisting the social status quo and the imposed conditions instead of surrender to the rules of their respective societies.

Chapter One

The Return of the Repressed Narrative:
Antinarrative as
Hysterical Narrative and Fantasy

"[I]f I find myself way off into an improbable tale . . . then I can guess something horrible has happened to me and that I can't bear to think about it . . . do you think this is how storytelling came into being? That the story is only the mask for the truth?"
-Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

"What would have happened if my tongue had actually been cut off? Would not all my difficulties have ended there and then?"
-Salwa Bakr, "Thirty-One Beautiful Green Trees"

Although Toni Morrison and Salwa Bakr come from different sociopolitical backgrounds, they share the experience of being women in patriarchal societies. Both are considered postcolonial writers, as will be discussed in this chapter, and both are in constant search of different resistance techniques in their writings in order to counternarrate their societies' grand narratives. Women in their respective societies went through two similar stages of resistance which moved from the general to the more particular; from the problems of racism and independence to those of women's rights and identity.

Part of the resistance in the second stage in both writers' respective worlds has become to narrate the antinarratable and to set the counternarratives free from the confinements of traditions and social constraints. Both writers found their duty is to give voice to these detained narratives. The repressed silence was finally shattered in several forms of writing: a combination of hysterical and fragmented narratives, fantasies that

reflect dissociation from traumas, or seemingly direct narratives.[4] The greater the psychological trauma is the more complicated the narrative technique would be.

Morrison's world and a history of resistance

In Morrison's case the first stage of resistance started with the battle against racial injustice. From the end of the nineteenth century until the mid twentieth century, African American citizens were fighting against racism and segregation policies. Finally, and as results of social movements, in 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed followed by the Voting Rights Act in 1965. [5] The second phase of resistance began in the late sixties and lasted throughout the seventies when women in both Europe and the United States, encouraged by the success of the civil rights movement, realized that it was time to resist oppression and discrimination based on gender. It is as Sara Evans asserts "It was from this network of southern women, whose involvement dated from the beginning of SNCC and who understood their commitment in theological formulas of ultimate commitment, that the earliest feminist response emerged" (100).

African American feminists, however, realized that this emerging new movement did not represent them properly as their oppression was different from that of the white

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[4] *Dictionary of Psychology* of the Penguin Reference Books Series defines "dissociation" as: "the breaking off connection of any kind, in any sort of combination; used in special sense, originally by French school of psychopathology, or a functional interruption of associations or connections in the mind . . upon which the revival of memories and of systems of ideas depends, as well as the personal control normally exercised by over various motor processes, and producing forgetting, negative hallucinations, anesthesias, etc., and generally the phenomena produced by repression"(70).

[5] According to *The Cambridge Companion To The African American Novel*, social movements and non-violent protests and boycotts (such as Montgomery Bus Boycott 1956, Greensboro sit-in 1960, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) founded 1960, Civil Rights March on Washington 1963, Selma to Montgomery marches 1965) in addition to the rise of Martin Luther King as Civil rights leader and a wide range of black writings (such as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), John O. Killens's *And Then We Heard the Thunder*; James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962) all contributed to the passing of these laws (xiv-xv).

women. [6] Black feminists of the late sixties, such as Frances M. Beal in her renowned article “Double Jeopardy,” argued that for black women, the struggle is one of “life-and-death,” she also added that

> If the white groups do not realize . . . . that the reasons for their condition lie in a debilitating economic and social system, and not simply that men get a vicarious pleasure out of "consuming their bodies for exploitative reasons," then we cannot unite with them around common grievances . . . . because they're completely irrelevant to black women in particular or to the black struggle. (174-5)

Black women suffered first from the devastating socioeconomic conditions that mostly resulted from racial discrimination, and then they suffered at the hands of the black patriarchy who intended to have the upper hand in the struggle calling for black women to “step back into a domestic, submissive role” as Beal asserts (169). Again in *Race Matters*, Cornel West underlines the fact that “black nationalist movements tend to draw on a heritage narrative of white oppression that masks how such movements increase the power of black men over black women” (West, 35). Black women, then, found themselves countering both white and black grand narratives.

Although the African American community was not literally colonized, it shares the experience of colonialism / postcolonialism with other countries as it was marginalized through the hegemony of a discourse of slavery and racism. Thus, in order not to be marginalized / colonized, the African American community internalized the standards of the “Other” dominant discourse, as described by Frantz Fanon, “all colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave-position themselves in relation to the

[6] Other important figures such as Cellestine Ware, Shulamith Firestone, Anne Koedt, Patricia Haden, Donna Middleton, and Patricia Robinson.

civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture" (2). The African American subjects were forced by this discourse to look at themselves, as W. E. B. Du Bois argues, "through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,-an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (qtd. in Gates, 123).[7] Thus, the African American intellectual finds herself forced to resist this damaging internalization that would eventually erase the black identity by reconstructing this identity through her writing.

The newly formed African American discourse seemed to be dominated by both the internalization of the hegemonic discourse and the black patriarchy. Thus what is narratable and what is not was formed according to these new dominating criteria. African American women writers who dared to defy the black patriarchy were severely attacked by African American critics to the point of "excommunicating" them from the black community as Ann duCille states (559). Renowned names such as Lerone Bennett, Jr., Addison Gayle, and Ishmael Reed, to name a few, accused African American women writers of shattering the "true story" (qtd. in duCille, 559). Bennett and other African American critics and historians appointed themselves the official tellers of this story, attempting to render the rest of the voices that countered theirs as false or, as duCille states, "charged not only with historical inaccuracy but with racial infidelity . . . and inventing historical fictions that serve a feminist rather than a black nationalist agenda" (560).

On the other hand, African American women writers sensed the missing existence of the problems of the black women in the writing of their fellow black male writers. In an

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[7] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, 1903.

interview, Morrison commented on renowned black novelists such as Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright, saying that their work, as far as addressing the problems of African American women, were “miss[ing] some intimacy, some direction, some voice . . . I didn’t feel [they] were telling me something” (qtd. in Duvall, 25).

Fantasy and hysteria in *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye was one of the early works by an African American woman writer that offered a counternarrative in response to the dominant black discourse. Published in 1970, during the African American women’s literary renaissance, the novel tackles the years that followed the Great Depression. It narrates an antinarratable story and at the same time it responds to sociopolitical movements that struggled against the mass media standardization of beauty that exclude some minority groups, causing their members to have no chance to conform to society.[8] The novel exposes the psychological pitfalls of internalizing such standards within the black community and argues that oppression does not only come through an external party, i.e. the non-black majority, but also from the inside.

The Bluest Eye also addresses the oppression of the black community during the past and how it is reflected on the present disturbed familial relationships. In Haaken’s study she points out that “[s]exual violations may be difficult to disentangle from the larger web of social forces that crush the spirits of parents and children” (1072). Hence, Cholly Breedlove is himself a victim of an oppressive racial society before he is an incestuous parent.

Cholly’s traumatic experience takes place when he is forced to have sexual intercourse with his girlfriend under the threat of white hunters’ guns. His powerless anger

[8] Movements such as Black Power and Black is Beautiful that rose during the 1960s and 1970s.

is not oriented towards the oppressors but towards his fellow victim Darlene: "Cholly, moving faster, looked at Darlene. He hated her. He almost wished he could do it—hard, long, and painfully, he hated her so much" (116). Both Haaken and Herman see that the perpetrator is the first victim, thus he consequently is constantly in need of validation, even from his victim: "he appears to have a psychological need to justify his crimes; he needs the victim's affirmation. Thus he relentlessly demands from his victim professions of respect, gratitude, or even love. His ultimate goal appears to be the creation of a willing victim" (*Trauma*, 75-6). The "willing victim" would give him the validation which oppressive circumstances deprived him from getting.

In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison represents black men who take pleasure in molesting children. Cholly, Mr. Henry, Soaphead Church and some of the family members of Rosemary Villanucci—the next door neighbor—but although we are only aware of Cholly's traumatic experience, we sense that the past experiences of the others would be of similar nature. All are what Haaken calls "defeated father[s]," or father figures, who are themselves victims of a whole system (1073). In their turn, they vent their long repression on the defenseless black girls who "no one inquired of" and are both "gullible [and] vulnerable" as Morrison states in the "Afterword" (171).

Pecola's failure comes as Ania Loomba argues from "the discovery of the black subject of the impossibility of attain[ing] the whiteness [s]he has been taught to desire" (176). Pecola, like Cholly, becomes a defeated person. Again, Herman and Hirschman see that in some cases, the subject of the incest rape may "feel[…] that this is the only kind of love she can get, and prefers it to no love at all" ("Incest," 748). The internalization of the Eurocentric standards of beauty, most apparent in Pauline's treatment of her daughter, has eventually convinced Pecola of how ugly she is, even when Pauline saw her daughter for

the first time as a baby she announced to herself: ". . . I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" as if she has decided her daughter's fate (100). When her father rapes her, part of Pecola unconsciously feels grateful for the attention she at last receives.

Pecola's inability of narrating society's injustice and her rape is finally turned into a fantasy that allows her to escape her dark reality. The wish of getting blue eyes is granted in her ailing imagination, marking her disappearance into madness. The adult Claudia blames not only her society, but rather the whole "soil" for this: "it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. . . . and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live" (164).

Once again, Cholly directs the anger that results from his failure in his work and his marriage towards his daughter Pecola. Pecola, a victim of her own family and some of her schoolmates, resists through silence and dissociation that leads to fantasy. She is too fragile to revisit her trauma, and as a result, cannot mourn. Herman sees fantasy as a "formidable impediment to mourning," a process that altogether prevents healing (*Trauma*, 190). She describes fantasy as "fueled by the desire for a victory over the perpetrator" (*Trauma*, 190). Here, Pecola unconsciously holds society responsible for her dilemma and getting blue eyes is a victory over such a society i.e. the true perpetrator.

Repressing trauma is transformed into a silent fantasy in Pecola's case. Her little prayer "[p]lease make me disappear" (33) is a result of what Said describes as "the imperialist power that would . . . compel you to disappear" a desire arises by society's disregarding of such a girl as if she is invisible (*Imperialism*, 343). This notion is clear in the incident of Mr. Yacobowski, the store owner, who "[a]t some fixed point in time and

space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" this fatal gaze, or rather non-gaze, is what compels Pecola to disappear gradually into madness (37). The white dominant culture penetrated too deep into the African American psyche that failing to match its standards means, to some, to die or disappear. The last lines convey that Pecola will be locked in such a state forever, unable to narrate her story. Thus emerge the role of Claudia MacTeer, which will be elaborated in the coming chapter.

Silence in *Paradise*

In *Paradise*, Morrison demonstrates the clash of the grand narrative with the counternarratives. The novel is set in an all-black small town governed by a conservative attitude. As a reaction to past repressions, the people of Ruby go to the other extreme: they create an all-black town where only pure blooded African Americans are allowed to live. Once again this society constructs itself as a "self" and those who are different as an "Other." This "Other" becomes an "alter ego" to help with "[t]he construction of [their] identity" thus, this "Other" bears whatever qualities the self finds inappropriate as Edward Said argues (*Orientalism*, 332). The Ruby community constructs itself as conservative, virtuous, protecting its women, while it constructs the other community of the Convent as rootless and promiscuous and hence needs to be controlled or eradicated altogether otherwise it will cause great damage to their community.

Living in a patriarchal society such as Ruby, women are designated certain roles that they cannot transcend. As Hortense J. Spillers explains it:

> . . the patriarchal daughter remains suspended as a social positionality between . . established territories. Bearing a name that she carries by courtesy of legal fiction and bound toward one that she must acquire in order "to have" her own children, "daughter" maintains status only insofar as she succeeds in disappearing, in

> deconstructing into "wife" and "mother." (231)

Accordingly, those who would choose to act outside these roles are labeled as outcasts or mad.

Before starting their own community, the men of Ruby face rejection even from other black communities because they are darker in skin, an event they call “the Disallowing.” Such rejection ultimately causes a deep feeling of shame. In J. Brooks Bouson’s study, she argues that “other defenses against shame include the defiance of Shamelessness . . . and turning the tables in the attack-other script, in which the shamed individual actively shames and humiliates others” (132). It is the same reaction of Cholly after he is deeply humiliated by the white hunters: victims of shame continue taking revenge on others whom they can control.

In such a small patriarchal community, the boundaries of what is antinarratable are easily set. Women find it harder to speak, to narrate whatever traumas they went through and they remain in a state of repression, fearing they will lose their social status.

The only time we discover the reality of Ruby’s community is when Patricia Best tries to collect the history of her town into a book. Eventually she burns her project, overcome by the tyranny of the grand narrative. In the section entitled “Patricia” the last lines read “Dear God . . Dear dear God. I burned the papers” as if she is compelled to do so (217). Some psychoanalysts believe that the power of writing is greater than that of verbal narration of trauma. [9] According to Juliet Mitchell, “the writer presents himself to another and thus sets up a position from which to perceive himself” (131). Thus, although Patricia may have already destroyed the manuscript, she already had found the opportunity to

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[9] Some of them are: Juliet Mitchell in “Trauma, Recognition, and the Place of Language.” And Gemma Corradi Fiumara in *The Symbolic Function: Psychoanalysis and the Philosophy of Language*.

address her repressed feelings concerning the problem of marginalizing her and her family merely because they are light-skinned. Simultaneously the act of burning the "repressed" which comes into a written form proves the power of society's dominant narrative that stopped her from telling a counter story. Patricia, like Sayyida in "That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice," preferred a comfortable yet bitter surrender to society's rules rather than countering its dominant story. She is one of those characters who remain in a grey area wavering between a state of healing and psychological suffering.

Sweetie is an example of the silence that prevails in Ruby. She is a mother of four ailing children who need constant and extensive care. When she collapses under the physical and psychological burden and goes wandering aimlessly, a girl leads her to the Convent, where she has a fever. In her hallucinations, Sweetie insists on leaving the place, unconsciously exposing what she and other women of Ruby feel towards the Convent, she has internalized the image of the "Other" that her society constructed that she sees the girl who saved her as "a personification of Sin, and the women who take her in as hawks and demons" (Wood, 172). She succeeds in repressing her inner self and in putting aside any logical thinking.

Sweetie's persistence in getting out of the Convent is caused by a fear, not of the women there, but of a repressed dissident who lies deep inside her wishing to get out and expresses herself. Sweetie's repressed trauma finally takes the shape of hallucinations about crying children but she desperately refuses any sort of narrative and returns to Ruby, i.e. to silence.

Another character that represses her narrative is Dovey Morgan. Dovey leads an unhappy life with her husband. She suffers several miscarriages and knows that she cannot have children anymore. She gradually develops a secret contempt for the patriarchy and

the rules she lives within. Through the third person omniscient narrator, we are allowed a glimpse at Dovey's inner thoughts: "Dovey *thought*, by what nobody *talked* about" (83). [10] Dovey's repressed thoughts and opinions come in the shape of an imaginary Friend to whom she can "talk[…] nonsense. Things she didn't know were in her mind. Pleasures, worries, things unrelated to the world's serious issues. Yet he listened intently to whatever she said" (92). Even her ridicule of the futile discussions around the motto written on the Oven the only one she can confide in is the Friend: "this matter was one she would bring to her Friend—when he came back to her" (87).

Dovey associates her Friend with flying, suggesting a desire to escape. Just before he first appears, she has a vision: "Then a mighty hand dug deep into a giant sack and threw fistfuls of petals into the air. . . . . butterflies. A trembling highway of persimmon-colored wings cut across the green treetops forever then vanished," and then the Friend appears for the first time (91). The Friend is a fantasy that compensates Dovey for her empty life in Ruby; he also is a substitute for a listener that she can talk freely to about her "forbidden" counternarratives.

Patricia, Sweetie, Dovey, and other women in Ruby are "women who subscribe to the town's patriarchal ideology do[ing] so at the cost of limiting their possible identities to that of the tender of a man's home and the nurturer of a man's children" (Duvall, 144). But the repressed feelings eventually return in different shapes even though each one of them try to suffocate her narrative fearing both the social consequences and the bitterness of facing the self, the latter is clearer in the case of Aziza in Salwa Bakr's *The Golden Chariot*.

Bakr's world and two stages of resistance

[10] Emphasis added.

Salwa Bakr belongs to the 1970s generation of Egyptian women writers. She lived in the era of the shattered dreams of Nasser's socialism and Arab unity, the different upheavals that took place in Sadat's Egypt, and their political and socio-economic consequences in the time of Mubarak.

Bakr's novel and selected short stories, published in Arabic in the mid 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, mainly tackle the aftermath of Sadat's "Open Door" policy. Corruption, poverty and ugliness—in addition to the rise of religious conservatism prevailed in the lives of a big sector of Egyptians—all contributed to the formation of new values in Egypt which eventually played different roles in the suppression of women's voices, marginalizing them, and re-designating them to specific roles that stifled their creativity and independence. [11]

Egyptian women, like African American women, have gone through two stages of resistance: the first stage was during colonialism in which women were part of the collectivity. In the struggle of decolonization, individuals tend to lose their individuality in the collective self of the colonized nation. In that stage the losing of the self is "enriched by the collective one" as Latifa al-Zayyat asserts (138).

In the process of decolonization and in the short period that followed the 1952 revolution, the patriarchal nature of society falsely seemed to come to an end. As Hoda El Sadda remarks, even after the revolution gave women political rights they sought for a long time, the same régime "disbanded the Egyptian Women's Union established by Huda Sha'rawi in 1923" along with other political parties (*Arab Women Writers*, 126). By the beginning of the 1960s, it became clear that the revolution would give no more freedoms

[11] Magda Al-Nowaihi also believes that the government itself in Sadat's era adopted a policy of a "moral high ground, and was incessantly involved in loud sermonizing" which rendered the writers who oppose such policy as "envious, spiteful, covetous, shameless, and immoral if they dared to question or object" ("National Community," 8).

to people. Again in the Sadat era when Egypt was still dealing economically and psychologically with the aftermath of the Six-Day War, women's issues of freedom and identity had to be postponed because Egypt was focused on its ardent desire to get back the Sinai Peninsula that was lost in 1967. However, when political threats finally seemed to be settled, the difficult economic circumstances and the rise of religious conservatism formed new stumbling blocks for women who were just starting a search for the politicized self.

This heralded the second stage of resistance. In the postcolonial era, women who strive to find their lost identity are faced with new challenges. The call of the patriarchal societies to limit the women's participation in socio-political life and to muffle their public voices causes these women to question their societies and the political transformations that took place in them. The limitation of the role of women remains because it is well-suited to both the patriarchal and the conservative attitudes which found the newly forming awareness of women and their desire for education, work, and independence threatening. Living in such a society helped to create a sort of self-censorship on counternarratives and consequently the scope of what is "antinarratable" grew larger.

Return of the repressed: hysterical narrative and fantasy

This society helps to create censors who internalize its conservative ideology such as the mothers or sisters who are deeply rooted in the patriarchal culture. In "Thirty-One Beautiful Green Trees," Kareema the protagonist ends up in a mental institution for questioning the norms of a society and a whole country that became ugly, hypocritical, and corrupt. Her outspoken nature clashes with her society that expects women to be contented with their status quo. Towards the end of the story she remembers her mother threatening her as a little girl "to cut off [her] tongue" if she revealed small domestic

secrets to her father (24/81).[12] Kareema wonders, while on the brink of mental collapse, whether it was better for her to cut off her own tongue:

> What would have happened if my tongue had actually been cut off? Would not all my difficulties have ended there and then? Would I not have kept silent forever? I would have contented myself with watching what went on around me without expressing my opinion. (25/82)

But is this only Kareema the protagonist, or is it Bakr the novelist who is wondering about the merits of silence in such a stifling atmosphere? The expression of opinion is not only a challenge to Kareema, but to Bakr herself and her contemporary women writers. The hysterical and fragmented story of Kareema mirrors Bakr's own anger towards her society and its injustices towards women. Kareema is, as Gilbert and Gubar claim, one of Bakr's faces.[13] Madness in women writings in general, as Ferial Ghazoul asserts, is "a transparent cover that simultaneously conceal and reveal" ("Madwoman," 6). The state of madness puts the character in the periphery and while isolated from the center there is freedom of expressing what is "unlikely, disowned and out of context," again as Ghazoul confirms (6).[14]

In the previous quotation from the story, Bakr uses what Gerald Prince terms "the disnarrated." Prince defines this type of narration as "consist[ing] of hopes, desires, imaginings and pondering, unreasonable expectations and incorrect beliefs since it depicts what is not or what might be and is often linked to carelessness, ignorance, or limitations

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[12] In all the quotes from Salwa Bakr's work, I mention the page numbers of both the English as well as the Arabic versions.

[13] In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that Victorian women writers used different techniques to make their female characters reflect different aspects of their inner selves, or of what they wish to experience but find it hard due to social constraints.

[14] Translation is mine.

resulting from insanity, delirium, an obsession, a psychological trauma" (4). The disnarrated, unlike the antinarrative, does not actually happen, but it takes place in the character's mind. This technique better suits confined characters such as Kareema, Pecola, and Aziza in *The Golden Chariot*.

Repressing narrative, then, becomes the obvious solution for women under close scrutiny from their societies. Nevertheless, as Freud and Breuer state, "the repressed idea takes its revenge, however, by becoming pathogenic" in Kareema's case this repression returns in the shape of a "hysterical narrative" which she tries to scribble down before she dies in a mental hospital (Breuer and Freud, 210).

Dinah Manisty notices that some of Bakr's characters resemble "[t]he fictional character of the deranged woman who haunts the margins of the[..] nineteenth-century texts" (154).[15] Kareema's narrative is, as Rasheed el-Enany notes, "by dint of its very logical form, sense of order, and clear narration," fragmented, and moves between actual incidents, dreams, and fantasies (383). Her last effort to resist both a growingly rigid society and her own deteriorating mental faculties is a desperate attempt to tell her story hoping that someone will read it someday. In a study about Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," Paula A. Treichler differentiates between the telling of the story to "a living soul" versus to a "dead paper," in Kareema's case the tyranny of the antinarrative forces her, like Patricia in *Paradise*, to narrate her story to the "dead paper" (Treichler, 61).

Kareema's problems are caused by her inability to realize the censored atmosphere that prevail her society. When she acts on the spur of the moment and kisses her colleague at work while on a romantic date, he gets angry and separates himself from her

[15] Works such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) or even Henry James' disturbed narrator in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

immediately, much like Morrison's Consolata whose spontaneity also caused the man she loves to walk away forever: "the poison spread. Consolata had lost him. Completely. Forever" (239). Both men felt threatened by the sense of freedom, spontaneity, and individuality the women possess versus their own fake conservatism and blind subordination to the dominant discourse.

Kareema represents those more fragile women who refuse to conform to the rigid rules of the social game. Madness, according to society, becomes "the refusal of a human being to conform to pre-ordained cultural / political / social / sexual roles" as Hoda El Sadda explains (Introduction, 20).

While Kareema resists both oppression and madness through hysterical narrative, Aziza in *The Golden Chariot* resists trauma through denial and fantasy. In "Thirty-One Beautiful Green Trees" Bakr uses the first person as her narrator highlighting the persisting need of the protagonist to tell her experiences no matter how painful they are or how her mental powers have declined. Aziza, on the other hand, never tells her story to anyone in prison. Even her inmates are only aware of her offense, not the reasons behind it. The reader knows all the intimate details through a third person omniscient narrator reflecting the protagonist's refusal to revisit her trauma and deal with it.

Till her death at the end of the novel, Aziza remains delusional about her relationship with her stepfather. She utterly refuses to see the incestuous and abusive nature of it. El-Enany describes her as a "willing victim" (388). However, her consent comes from her being very young then, in addition to hers, and also her mother's, view of the stepfather as an extraordinary character who in more than one occasion is described as "capable of influencing men and women alike" (10/19) and "arousing strong emotions . . akin to fear and awe" (13/22). This kind of perpetrators is what Evans and Maines define as "the

velvet glove perpetrator" this perpetrator, like the stepfather, is capable of convincing the victim of silence by simply threatening to "withdraw [his] love" (309). Eventually the victim would realize the antinarratability of her story and would never tell it due to "the silencing effect of the dominant taboo story" again as Evan and Maines argue (312).

Haaken and Herman both address the aspect of "seductive father-daughter relationships" and they associate the phenomenon with patriarchal societies (Haaken, 1075). Herman believes that "the seduction of daughters is an abuse which is inherent in a father-dominated family system" ("Incest," 741). Similar to Morrison's *Paradise*, those who control discourse may feel that it is their right to break the rules every now and then.

Although her situation is different from a hostage, the attitude of Aziza towards her stepfather is similar to Stockholm syndrome; she is the stepfather's victim and yet she develops a deep attachment to him and totally refuses to consider him as anything but a "lover," and a "protector." The *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* argues that:

> Kindness serves as the cornerstone of Stockholm syndrome; the condition will not develop unless the captor exhibits it in some form toward the hostage. However, captives often misinterpret a lack of abuse as kindness and may develop feelings of appreciation for this perceived benevolence. (De Fabrique, 14)

Thus, when Aziza grows up and starts to understand more about her situation and the true nature of her affair with the stepfather, her delusional love towards him continued due to her mere gratitude for his kindness and generosity. Again Herman and Hirschman explain the complexity of such a relationship by distinguishing it from rape as "it occurs in the context of a caring relationship" (748).

Aziza offers herself a sort of a different compensatory narrative which revolves around a benevolent man "who had protected her and raised her from innocent girlhood to

. . . womanhood" (8/13). She is psychologically too fragile to face herself with the truth that this man had robbed her of her innocence and childhood and encouraged her to betray her blind mother's trust. She is incapable of narrating the true cause of her coming to prison to any other inmate for fear that they may confront her with a truth that will shatter her "beautiful" past. Her alternative narrative is a shield that protects her from facing the ugly truth.

Aziza's complete denial of an abusive past is also due to society's constraints on narrative. Herman's discussion of hidden traumatic experiences in the nineteenth century applies to a great extent to the women of both Bakr and Morrison: "the real conditions of women's lives were hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life. The cherished value of privacy created a powerful barrier to consciousness and rendered women's reality practically invisible" (*Trauma*, 28).

The silence that dominates Aziza's narrative is also part of her relationship with her mother. We remain, like Aziza, uncertain whether the mother knew the true nature of the relationship between her daughter and her own husband. In the final chapter Aziza is contemplating that thought: "she decided that her mother must have discovered the truth about the relationship . . . and approved of it, preferring to keep silent for many reasons" (186/339). A blind person, like the mother, is usually of great insight so there is a possibility that she guessed what was taking place in her small family especially when Aziza kept refusing one suitor after another. Nevertheless, she never faced Aziza fearing the truth and its inappropriateness. The fear of exposing an antinarrative encouraged the silence of the mother.

The true story of Aziza is rendered "antinarratable" and it is the place of the narrator, the third person omniscient narrator, to defy its "inappropriateness." It is Aziza's narrative

versus the narrator's one. Aziza's account of a unique love story is defied by the narrator's facts about an incestuous relationship that kept Aziza from living a normal childhood, adulthood, or even finishing her education. Bakr uses a third person omniscient narrator versus a free indirect discourse technique to accentuate Aziza's total rejection of the reality of her relationship with the stepfather.

While in prison, Aziza starts to build another fantasy about a golden chariot that will take some of the inmates, whom she considers as victims of injustice, and ascend to heaven. Aziza's fantasy is a device to escape facing reality and to resist its harshness. This fantasy, like the fantasy of her love story with the stepfather, captures the repressed trauma of her imprisonment whether in the big house in Alexandria or in the real prison. Both fantasies resist reality and the silence that was imposed upon the antinarrative.

The tyranny of the antinarrative continues in the story of Shafiqa whom the horrible traumatic murder of her elder sister rendered her both speechless and epileptic. The sister, who is a beautiful young widow and a mother of three, fell in love with a Christian man and her father and brother hire a professional assassin to kill her. When Shafiqa knew she is deeply shocked, she escapes the house and leads a homeless life.

Shafiqa remains silent and we know her story through a third person omniscient viewpoint. Her traumatic experience keeps returning in the shape of epileptic fits. The psychiatrist in charge in the prison fails to realize the psychological state of Shafiqa "he insists that she is perfectly sane" as the narrator sarcastically tells us (163/299). Warhol sees that a narrative "*must* be told for healing to occur and, for that matter, for the novel to get written" (224). Thus, although Shafiqa will never narrate her trauma and accordingly

will never be healed, the readers themselves might learn how to resist the oppressive silence and start acting differently in dealing with their own traumas.

The narrator not only gives voice to the trauma of Shafiqa, but she also gives both voice and space to the murdered sister and her dilemma of loving a man from different religion. The silence prevails in the story, the brother and father do not confront the elder sister, but they directly hire someone to kill her fearing a scandal. Again Bakr challenges the silence that dominates the story by treading on such sensitive areas and conventional taboos while exposing the cruelty of honor crime that is still practiced in most of the Arab societies against women without raising so much criticism.

Bakr illustrates through Kareema, Aziza, and Shafiqa how the repressed returns in the shape of hysterical narrative, fantasy, or bitter silence with epileptic outbursts. The censorship that conservative societies put on the individuals in general and on women in particular renders so many aspects of their narratives antinarratable that they consciously or unconsciously stop themselves from telling.

In Morrison's and Bakr's respective societies the outlines of the antinarrative are shaped as results of different socio-political circumstances. The oppressive silence eventually prevents the counter narratives that long to oppose the master story. However, these repressed narratives find a way to surface once more through different psychological tricks such as hysterical fragmented narratives, or fantasy that indicate a complete dissociation from the traumatic event. The occurrence of the counter narratives even in these indirect shapes represents a sort of resistance to oppression that the character would resort to as a result of her fragility and of the intensive and prolonged trauma she was exposed to.

Chapter Two

Narrative as a Healing Process

"Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break."
-Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, IV.iii. 209-210

"It would be psychologically demoralizing for women to bond with other women on the basis of shared victimization. They bond with other women on the basis of shared strengths and resources. This is the woman bonding feminist movement should encourage. It is this type of bonding that is the essence of Sisterhood."
- bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*

Fiction as a device of resistance

In the *Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, David Herman argues that "[a] key question for narrative study is how stories can both shore up hegemony, in the form of master narratives, but also critique such domination, by way of counter narratives" (278). The novel, as a literary genre, does accommodate a considerable number of techniques that can defy and subvert the master narrative with numerous stories. At the same time, these techniques help the reader to participate in the act of reading the work and take an active part in interpreting it within the context he/she lives in.

Women writers like Toni Morrison and Salwa Bakr, in their turn, resist different hegemonic discourses through such creative techniques of writing that question accepted social practices and simultaneously challenge classic literary traditions. Morrison and Bakr seek to undermine the constructed discourses which fix women within a set of binary oppositions that always present them as the "Other" of the binary formula such as male/female, good/bad, reason/madness, language/silence. They both help the reader, through their writings, to become aware of the sociopolitical and economic conditions and

the vital role they play in shaping the hegemonic discourses. Thus, they make their readers realize new possibilities, new visions, and new narratives that stand against the rigidity of master narratives.[16]

Morrison and Bakr do not lament their places in the periphery as women in a patriarchal society because this very position allow them to manipulate and deconstruct both social and classic literary traditions into new mediums free from prejudices.[17] However, they create, through their respective works, worlds where marginalized voices are pulled to the center and allowed to articulate themselves. Both authors show how narrative can be a healing device for the characters and even for the author herself, and how overcoming the boundaries of the antinarrative requires a supportive group that substitutes the role of the family through providing validation to a narrative of resistance. This group can be a sisterhood that embraces the traumatized subject, or the readers themselves that the narrator is addressing and seeking their validation.

Both writers are present in their texts through one or more characters. This character either encourages a fragmented and traumatized narrative or tries to articulate oppressive silence.

Articulating the silence in *The Bluest Eye*

In *The Bluest Eye,* the silence of Pecola, and of her community, is articulated through Claudia, the narrator who found in giving voice to the misfortunes of one of her peers a way to understand the dynamics of her society, or, as Claudia puts it, the "how" (*Bluest*

[16] Examples of master narratives are Marxism, capitalism, nationalism, religion, and science. Jean-François Lyotard argues in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) that "totality, stability, and order are maintained in modern societies through the means of 'grand narratives' which are stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs" (qtd. in Klages, 174).

[17] Both Morrison and Bakr do not hold any official positions. Morrison taught at several universities in the United States and Bakr practices creative writing. Thus both do not belong to the center nor aspire to. In a personal interview, Bakr described herself as a "marginalized person exactly like [her] characters."

Eye, 3). What Patricia Best attempted but could not accomplish in Morrison's *Paradise* through writing the history of Ruby, Claudia actually concludes through writing the history of Pecola and of her town. The writing process acts as a way towards a revelation that will eventually set Claudia free. In a study about expressing traumas through writing, James W. Pennebaker asserts that "the mere act of disclosure is a powerful therapeutic agent that may account for a substantial percentage of the variance in the healing process" (162).

The Bluest Eye is told by a third person omniscient narrator who focalizes through Claudia the child and Claudia the adult. Alternating between three modes of narration reflects the struggle and the confusion of the little narrator of writing about such a traumatic history. The narrating voices overlap and complement each other and Claudia the child's lack of understanding is articulated through Claudia the adult. Claudia describes how she cannot understand everything the adults are discussing; it is like a dance or an opera in a foreign language: "The edge, the curl, the thrust of their emotions is always clear to Frieda and me. We do not, cannot, know the meanings of all their words, for we are nine and ten years old. So we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in timbre" (10). As Catherine Rainwater argues, Morrison's narrators "want to tell us the truth, but cannot find it" which rather reflects the complexity of the problem the narrator is handling and the impossibility of differentiating between a victim and a perpetrator (100).

Furthermore, by writing the story, Claudia is also resisting her own descending into insanity or depression. She might herself have gone through a traumatic experience which she tries to resist its devastating consequences by narrating another similar experience. When Frieda is molested by the tenant Mr. Henry, Claudia immediately links the

experience to Soaphead Church:

> "He ... picked at me."
> "Picked at you? You mean like Soaphead Church?"
> "Sort of."
> "He showed his privates at you?"
> "Noooo. He touched me."
> "Where?"
> "Here and here." She pointed to the tiny breasts that, like two fallen acorns, scattered a few faded rose leaves on her dress. (76)

Claudia's reaction reveals a first hand knowledge about the subject. James Mayo asserts that she also might have experienced sexual harassment as Pecola did (231). Mayo also believes that Claudia "has repressed the memory" of her own rape, however, by mourning Pecola's fate in a narrative, Claudia is actually exercising a therapeutic action (232).

Claudia's job is analogous to what Morrison herself is trying to achieve through her writing: to involve the readers as an inseparable part of her work. Claudia, as a narrator, seeks validation from her audiences, i.e. the readers. Both Carla Kaplan and Teresa de Lauretis agree that "strategies of writing and of *reading* are forms of cultural resistance" (Kaplan, 339). [18] In an interview with Cecil Brown, Morrison emphasized the role of the reader: ". . . that's what I work toward, . . . where the reader can come in, like a congregation, or like an audience at a musical concert, where they participate in it and I have to make it open enough so that they can" (466). Marilyn Mobley McKenzie suggests that in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison involves the reader through the use of "the plural pronoun" especially in the final paragraph when Claudia is mourning Pecola's fate (223):

[18] Emphasis added

> All our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us – all who knew her – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used – to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (162-3)

Like Claudia, the reader now shares the responsibility, and is not only a detached recipient.

The disruption of chronological order in the novel emphasizes the significance of memory and the complexity of remembering traumatic events. Morrison uses this technique, whether through the omniscient narrator or the first person narrator. Moving in time gives the sense of memorizing past events as if they are happening in the present moment. Psychiatrists who specialize in trauma argue that the entire traumatic experience is relived while involuntarily recalling it. The act of memorizing and also of dreaming about certain traumas is "experienced with terrifying immediacy, as if occurring in the present" as Herman asserts (*Trauma*, 39). This is reflected in the shifting between the present and the past in *The Bluest Eye*. Little Claudia's narrative of the past is interrupted by adult Claudia's present comments and sometimes the omniscient narrator's knowledge.

Morrison chooses to give her voice through Claudia, the co-narrator of the story. John Duvall sees Claudia as a rather "straightforward[...] . . portrait of the artist as a young woman" as she is trying to make sense of her past in order to be able to live her present (29). Morrison, at this early stage of her career as a writer, shares with Claudia a profound

desire to understand her community and society at large. She attempts to do this through rendering the antinarratable into a narratable story that allows her and her readers to grasp the complexity of the story, before they quickly dismiss the whole case as one of victim / perpetrator simple relationship.

The 'unyielding language' and the modes of narrating the antinarratable in *Paradise*

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that those who stand remote from the center can manipulate language and deconstruct its fixed meanings better than those who are in its center: "the Signifying Monkey—he who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language—is our trope for the repetition and revision, indeed, is our trope of chiasmus itself, repeating and simultaneously reversing in one deft, discursive act" (52). Thus, those who are remote can create a language that challenges the "fixity" which Houston Baker describes as "a function of power" with the flexibility of their own invented informal language (qtd. in Russell, 12).[19] Morrison's language is a hybrid of the official language of "power" i.e., of the center and that of her own African American culture. [20]

Morrison needs to break the oppressive silence into words in order to set her characters, her fellow African American women, and herself free in the process. She challenges language in *Paradise* by denying it the forefront in narrative while giving other artistic devices for it such as painting or music.

In *Paradise* Consolata plays almost the same role as Claudia. The five women in the Convent (Mavis, Grace, Seneca, Pallas, and Consolata herself) all repress their traumatic

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[19] Baker, Houston Jr. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

[20] I am using the term inspired by Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity in which he argues that postcolonial writers' culture are a mixture of their indigenous culture and that of the colonizer.

experiences for a long time, ignoring the devastating effects that harm their lives and threaten to destroy them completely. Consolata, however, suddenly realizes the power of narrative as a healing device.[21] In a moment of revelation she realizes her role as a mentor and a shaman who can exorcise the demons of the past through narrative: "I will teach you what you are hungry for" (262). Consolata represents the authorial voice in *Paradise*; she is offering to teach the Convent women and the reader how to tell her own story. Duvall believes that both Consolata and Patricia Best share the authorial voice in *Paradise*, however, Patricia could not finish her narrative, the power of both the antinarrative and the "one true story" compelled her to burn what she wrote (144). Consolata is Patricia's foil. She insists on narrating, or supporting, healing narratives until her mission is accomplished.

Consolata rejects language as a biased medium and offers the traumatized women an alternative way to narrate their past experiences and present calamities. Indeed Morrison highlights the absence of language in making the word "Unspeaking" a sentence of its own in the section entitled "Consolata" (263). Consolata then taught them how to express themselves through painting:

> They understood and began to begin. First with natural features: breasts and pudenda, toes, ears and head hair. Seneca duplicated in robin's egg blue one of her more elegant scars, one drop of red at its tip. Later on, when she had the hunger to slice her inner thigh, she chose instead to mark the open body lying on the cellar floor. . . . Gigi draws a heart locket . . . Pallas had put a baby in her template's

[21] The effects of repressing the traumas on the Convent women's are the following: Mavis ignores the repression her abusive husband and ill-disciplined children causes her till once she forgot her newly born twins in a closed car till they suffocate and die. Gigi, in her turn, tries to run away from the fact that her father is in a death row and that she did not know her mother all her life. She is trying to escape literally through travelling from one place to another and figuratively through drugs. Seneca abandoned as a child by her sister/mother, repressing her trauma she is in the habit of causing cuts in her skin all the time. She also, as a compensatory technique tries to enter into a number of disastrous relationships. Pallas, who also escapes from the traumatic fact that her mother stole her boyfriend. Connie also hides a lot of secrets about her traumatic past and lives in denial drinking and trying to forget her present.

> stomach. (265)

The act of painting is an agent for revealing the antinarratable. When the essential trauma is exposed (through painting) then talking about the trauma and its aftermath becomes a simpler task. Judith Herman observes that painting helps with "the most unbearable moments [when] the patient finds it more difficult to use words" (*Trauma*, 177). When Pallas paints a baby inside the figure drawn on the floor, the other women, including herself, find it more comfortable to discuss how she got pregnant and who the father is. Pallas before that could not even confess to herself that she is pregnant pretending to everyone that she is only overweight (265).

Both Consolata and Morrison rebel against language which cannot be freed from its limitations. In her Nobel lecture, Morrison described this notion as: "unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance" (5). In her estimation, language can misrepresent rather than express narrative. Language is that of the dominant discourse and the writer has to reinvent it through merging it with the language of the periphery in order to express what she and those she represents actually feel. Painting, as well as other artistic mediums, offers the tortured women ways of narrating without words, but nevertheless proves to be effective in the healing process. Homi Bhabha explains that the "right to narrate" does not only include writing but rather

> all those forms of creative behavior that allow us to represent the lives we lead, question the conventions and customs that we inherit, dispute and propagate the ideas and ideals that come to us most naturally, and dare to entertain the most audacious hopes and fears for the future. The right to narrate might inhabit a

> hesitant brush stroke, be glimpsed in a gesture that fixes a dance movement, become visible in a camera angle that stops your heart. Suddenly in painting, dance, or cinema you rediscover your senses. (180)

Language is also replaced by singing. Piedade who "sang but never said a word" is represented as a mystic figure or a goddess (264). In the closing scene of the novel Consolata is resting her head on Piedade's lap in a surreal place situated between fantasy and reality. Ingrid G. Daemmrich argues that by singing instead of using language Piedade is "emancipating herself from the tyranny of judgmental words" (227). [22] Indeed, French feminist Hélène Cixous describes *l'ecriture feminine* as "the voice, a song before the Law, before the breath was split by the symbolic, reappropriated into language under the authority that separates the deepest, most ancient and adorable of visitations" (qtd. in Ramsey, 140). [23]

The incorporation of fantasy in *Paradise*, and rather in postmodernist women's writings in general, comes to negate the tyranny of one possible reality. In the end of *Paradise*, there is no more distinction between fantasy and reality. Sunanda Pal elucidates the use of magic realism in African American fiction: "The mode of magic realism facilitates the presentation of an alternate reality, discredited by the west. . . . it becomes— the means of creating an African world-view. African cultural traditions thus are integrated into contemporary western literary tradition" (2442). It is clear in *Paradise* through the black women and Consolata not only as "African cultural tradition," but rather as multi-cultural traditions that include both Africa and South America and share the

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[22] According to *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*, in Portuguese, the word Piedade means "compassion;" Piedade is also a northern area of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (270).

[23] Hélène Cixous and Clément, Catherine, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.

experience of colonialism and postcolonialism. [24]

Together with the white girl, the women of the Convent form a sisterhood which Patricia Hill Collins asserts is a substitute for the family that “protects and balances the interests of all members” (218). Unlike Ruby’s paradise, the Convent is not an all-black community; it embraces black, South American, and even a white woman. Morrison commented in an interview: “You know everything about these women, their interior lives, their past, their behavior, that the one piece of information you don't know, which is the race, may not, in fact, matter. And when you do know it, what do you know?” (Interview C, 9). Through the sisterhood of the Convent, Morrison offers an alternative reality and a new meaning to the word family. This sisterhood is free from both class and race discriminations which bell hooks asserts is a basic requirement of a successful and strong sisterhood.

The acts of painting and narrating are represented as a group activity in *Paradise*. Judith Herman confirms that the psychological healing after trauma is a group project:

> [t]he core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. (*Trauma*, 133)

Moreover, the willing participation of the women in Consolata’s healing ritual proves their desire to be reconciled with the self instead of escaping reality. Morrison represents the way to the Convent as a pilgrimage to seek salvation through the unburdening of the self:

> . .it was women who walked this road. Only women. Never men. ... Back and

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[24] I believe that it is not a coincidence that the magic realism in *Paradise* is introduced through Consolata that comes from South America the birthplace of the genre.

> forth, back and forth: crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost. Out here ... women dragged their sorrow up and down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the pedestrians. (270)

The healing narrative then requires both the desire to be healed and a supportive group to encourage the traumatic narrative and to help to unfold it.

Paradise's women offer counternarratives through artistic mediums that transcend language and these stand in deep contrast with Ruby's masculine grand narrative that only uses violence to express itself. In order to achieve social control over their town after feeling threatened by the youths and their desire for radical changes, the elder generation of Ruby attacks the Convent women to prove their power over the present discourse. They even seek to control the narrative of the past and that of Ruby's history. In the Christmas pageant Patricia Best notices that every few years the number of the families representing Ruby's founders is decreased: "Why do they change it? There used to be nine families in the play. Then eight for years and years. Now seven" (215). Those who make the grand narrative may also manipulate it into their own interest. [25] Simultaneously, they may preclude any counternarratives or what Stéphane Robolin calls "unauthorized memories" from existing as they are certain that such narratives would undermine the social structure of their constructed patriarchal community (302).

The new counternarratives coming from the Convent defy the tyranny of the grand narrative. Morrison commented on her use of a multitude of voices in her work: "I try to give some credibility to all sorts of voices, each of which is profoundly different. Because what strikes me about African American culture is its variety" (Interview A, 19).

The voices also defy replacing one grand narrative with another, as Heather Russell

[25] As mentioned in *Paradise,* the Christmas pageant symbolizes the Disallowing when the black families of Ruby were denied shelter even by other black communities because they were darker in color (215).

fears can happen, because those new narratives do not represent one new master story, but several new stories that come from what Foucault calls the "subjugated discourses" (Russell, 3). Each of these voices is "unique and interwoven, each creating a singular path, yet also each entering a fruitful dialogue with the other" as Raynaud notes of the modern African American works (116).

Both Claudia and Consolata act as authorial voices for Morrison. Claudia is a willing narrator who is trying to put things that happened in the past together in order to be able to understand and live her present. Simultaneously she asks her readers to take part and support her narrative. Consolata, on the other hand, acts as a shaman whose mission is to heal tortured souls by teaching them how to unburden themselves through narrative. Both protagonists play the part of the author whose mission is to explain the "how" not the "why," and simultaneously teaches and encourages her readers to express their traumas in order to be able to live.

Salwa Bakr and techniques of resistance

Bakr, like Morrison, seeks to deconstruct both form and content in her work to undermine the supremacy of grand narratives and hegemonic discourses on the one hand, and the fixity of the literary traditions on the other. Bakr associates the classical Arabic language with the patriarchy; her writings mix the formal with the colloquial in what she labels as (Classic Colloquial language). [26] Bakr pointed out in an interview with Caroline Seymour-Jorn that: "The woman writer must create a new lexicon, a woman's lexicon . . . . it will be such that when you open the text you will feel that it was written by a woman and that it is a feminine text (161). Seymour-Jorn characterizes this technique as "emphasiz[ing] the richness of the popular language used by poor and uneducated

[26] The Arabic terms are: the classical Arabic language (al-fusha), colloquial (al-'ammiyya), Classic Colloquial language (al-'ammiyya al-fasiha).

women" (163). Hoda El Sadda believes that Bakr's colloquial Arabic has its roots in classical Arabic; Bakr then combines the oral tradition in the simple women's daily stories with the classical Arabic which is the language of the dominant discourse and creates a new hybrid of feminine language (Introduction, 23).[27]

Bakr uses what Prince calls the "unnarratable" a term stands for those events which are "unworthy of being told," or normal everyday unimportant actions (Prince, 2).[28] She narrates the unnaratable to depict the monotony of the prison life and the narrow world of her women characters, like Sayyida in "That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice." In *The Golden Chariot* she depicts minor details about food, smells, and other insignificant incidents, such as the ritual of making tea, the very presence of which implies the absence of more important events and hence the limited world of women in general (and those in prison in particular) (72/136).[29]

In her interview with Seymour-Jorn, Bakr confirmed that the "Arabesque technique" she used in *The Golden Chariot* proved "to be an effective way to deal with the problem of describing life in the prison, where activity is diminished to a minimum. .. this circular form of narration allow[..] portray[ing] the way in which a prisoner experiences time: as a series of repeated, mundane acts that have little or no consequence" (168).[30]

This technique also allows the disruption of the linearity of the story. The shift is not only from one story to another, but also from the memories of the past to the present

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[27] El Sadda gives examples from different short stories by Bakr where the veracity of the formal speeches is questioned. Stories are: "Zeinat at the President's Funeral" and "Going to Sleep on the More Comfortable Side."

[28] Also Prince calls it the "nonnarratable" and Warhol calls the "subnarratable" (3).

[29] Bakr commented on this particular passage in a personal interview that: "time in prison shrinks to nothing, zero degree. And if time disappears, human willpower will disappear as well."

[30] By Arabesque technique, Bakr means the story within a story technique (frame narrative), similar to that of *The Arabian Nights* as mentioned in Dinah Manisty's article.

events that actually take place in the novel. Sabry Hafez sees this as a general quality of the Arabic novel that emerged after the sixties: “the concept of time changed and its logical succession faded, being replaced by the dissolution of time and the free transition from the present to the past and from the past to the future and vice versa” (103-4).

The different types of narrative

As the title of chapter two, “The Heart of the Matter: the Meeting of Opposites,” indicates: Hinna is Aziza’s foil. Unlike Aziza, Hinna is more than willing to narrate her trauma to “any . . . prisoner who asked her [e]ven if she wasn’t close to them” (38/73). Hinna kills her sex-maniac husband after forty-five years of marriage; she finally finds “freedom” in prison through relating her story. In her trial, Hinna refuses to justify her crime simply because of her upbringing: “[she] was well aware of the first lesson of married life, that her mother had instilled in her . . . , which was that it was not permissible, under any circumstances, to speak about what goes on in the bedroom outside its walls” (44/85). Hinna sees her whole life with her husband as “antinarratable” to the point of preferring prison or even execution to telling such intimate details to other men, including her own sons. The power of the antinarrative that begins to take shape in early childhood imposes severe constraints on the narrative and impedes it.

The fluency and spontaneity of Hinna’s narrative are accentuated in the following paragraph:

> While they were eating with relish Hinna related to Aziza *simply* and *fluently*, as if she were telling the story of a good film . ., the really peculiar story of life with her husband which led her, in the end, to the women’s prison. She told it without a hint

> of anger or apparent regret; as she recounted the details of the story she appeared to be *extremely happy* since she would smile from time to time (37, 71).[31]

However, the traumatic events that Hinna endures for more than four decades and cannot talk about even with her mother or sisters negate the straightforwardness of her narrative. Her apparent resilience is consistent with neither her old age nor the intensity of her prolonged trauma. In *Trauma and Recovery* Herman specifies three stages for recovery from trauma: safety, remembrance / mourning, and reconnection with normal life (155). Moreover, in *Narrative Exposure Therapy*, the authors assert that "there is a breakdown in the ability to put the most emotional part of the traumatic event . . . into words" (Schauer, 14). Hinna's reminiscences are free from mourning and of emotions altogether marking her descent into insanity. This narrative comes too late to help her in achieving a psychological healing. The inconsistency between the narrative technique Bakr uses and the psychological state of the narrator makes us question both the veracity of the narrative itself and the sanity of the narrator.

In killing her husband, Hinna once again experiences trauma. Even if she considers this action as meant "to free herself from her husband" (38/73), the very act of killing eventually causes her to feel guilty and more significantly, to feel that she "can never change or compensate for the harm that was done" (*Trauma*, 189).[32] Hinna's fluency and the smile she wears while narrating such traumatic experiences reveal a state of madness caused by those sufferings. Bakr believes that after killing the husband Hinna reaches a

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[31] Emphasis added.

[32] I have consulted Prof. Judith Herman on this particular point and she made it clear that the act of killing the oppressor cannot liberate the victim. She also added in her email: ". . when one is helpless and humiliated, the fantasy of killing the oppressor is satisfying, but when retaliation becomes possible, it simply compounds the horror. Studies of Vietnam combat veterans indicated that the worst PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) was found among those who committed atrocities" (Email date: Aug. 1st, 2011).

place “beyond insanity, a place where she can find a sort of human tranquility and peace of mind” (Personal interview). [33]

The Golden Chariot in general (and the episode of Hinna in particular) is saturated with irony. Magda Al-Nowaihi describes Bakr’s ironic timbre as possessing a capacity to shock readers out of their apathy and self-pity; to produce an angry laughter that is hopefully more productive than despair; to disorient in order to reorient” (“Postcolonial Predicament” , 295). This irony helps the reader to distance herself from the characters and events while objectively detecting the incongruity between her expectations and what is actually taking place. The irony questions the worn out social customs which contribute to create familial tragedies. The third person omniscient narrator comments on such values when relating the story of Hinna who ended up killing her husband: “ it was impossible for someone like her, blessed with a correct and refined upbringing, to talk about personal matters concerning what goes on between men and women in the bedroom” (38/73). Bakr undermines such values through juxtaposing what is regarded as ideal, according to the dominant discourse, with its destructive effects. J. Hillis Miller convincingly argues that: “If one associates univocal sense-making with some masculine principle of authority, which Derrida has dubbed ‘phallogocentrism’ then irony can be defined as a species of castration,” and it is through irony that Bakr deconstructs not only the social traditions but also the classic meanings of language itself, i.e., logocentrism (254).

Fragmentation, another technique of postmodern writings, comes to express, among other features, the difficulty of the act of narrating. This difficulty may result from the traumatic nature of the experience that compels the narrator to resort to indirect psychological devices to tell her story. The traumatic memories intervene in the linearity

[33] I conducted an interview with Salwa Bakr dated Dec. 3rd, 2011.

of the story telling. Judith Herman asserts that those memories "lack verbal narrative and context; rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images" causing the narrative to become fragmented, as if in quick successive scenes (*Trauma*, 38). In order for the narrative to become a healing process, it needs support from the others, in addition to a willing narrator. Moreover, it needs someone who can help bringing together these fragmented and emotional narratives into a cohesive story which the narrator can later tell on her own. As Morrison does in *Paradise*, Bakr gives her authorial voice through the healers such as Umm El-Khayr, in *The Golden Chariot*, to underline her own role as a healer. [34]

Umm El-Khayr plays the role of the mother healer. Aziza refers to her as the ancient Egyptian goddess of fertility Hathor who represents a mother figure. She is the one who encourages narrative knowing that it is the only healing device available to those traumatized women. She plays the therapist role that Schauer, Neuner and Elbert assign: "the therapist assumes an empathic and accepting role . . . encourages the patient to describe the traumatic events in as much details as possible and to reveal the emotions . . . experienced at that moment" (26). Like Morrison's Consolata, Umm El-Khayr is an authorial presence who finds ways to extract the narrative of trauma. Umm El-Khayr does not only encourage narrative, but also pieces the fragmented memories together:

> The prisoners knew that Aida had been sent to prison . . . for murdering her husband but the details and reasons for this were only known after Umm El-Khayr pieced together the whole story. Once this occurred . . Aida started to tell her own story to any prisoner so that it should not remain locked inside her, eating away at her (84/162).

[34] In my interview with Bakr she stated that she puts herself into the place of her characters: "I embody my characters, exchange position with them based on what is humane."

Aida's newfound ability to tell her story to any of the prisoners after this initial struggle marks her healing.[35]

Through the narratives of Hinna and Aida—both are in prison charged with murdering their husbands—Bakr counters the angel / monster binary opposition that only sees woman as one of the two poles.[36] Hinna kills a sex-maniac husband who threatens to throw her out of her home after forty-five years of marriage while Aida readily accepts the blame for a crime she did not commit in order to save her brother, who actually killed her abusive husband. Both defy the image of a monster woman and as Barbara Harlow puts it: "What the state, and with it the traditional order, construes as women's 'crimes' punishable by law are recast [in Arab Women's writing] as gender issues—abuses, determined by class, as well as by gender oppression—against the women themselves" (151).

Bakr is also highlighting the idea of "sisterhood" that compensates for a failed family.[37] Those women forsaken by their own families, and rather by society, find a way to become reconciled to the self in each other's company. As in the sisterhood of the Convent in *Paradise*, this sisterhood, while not pretending to be a utopian space, is free from class problems. [38]

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[35] Magda al-Nowaihi finds that if Umm El-Khayr was outside prison, like Aida's mother, she would have acted in the same way Aida's mother did because of "the oppressive conditions of her world in Upper Egypt" (17).

[36] This is also apparent in some short stories such as "The Wiles of Men" where Bakr totally deconstructs the inherited picture of woman as a cunning creature. In this short story, it is the husband who surpasses his wives in cunning. "The Wiles of Men" is translated by Denys Johnson-Davies (1-11).

[37] Note how Barbara Harlow uses the term "sisterhood" in the chapter she translated from *The Golden Chariot* in the special issue of *Boundary 2* titled Feminism and Postmodernism.

[38] Characters from aristocratic backgrounds such as Aziza and Madam Zeinab, and well-educated inmates such as Dr. Bahiga form strong bonds with other poor and uneducated inmates or those who come from the country such as Umm El-Khayr and Aida.

Narrative does not always heal the narrator; there are certain conditions that have to be met in order to make the narrative effective as a healing device. Through Sayyida in "That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice," Bakr tackles the problem of repressing women's voices by denying them the right to narrate and discrediting their narrative if they were defiant enough to tell their stories. Sayyida's newly discovered "beautiful voice" may symbolize women's creativity or their willingness to tell a counternarrative. It also stands for the emergence of the dissident inside a woman who conformed for so long with the designated role society planned for her. Sayyida is quickly labeled as "mad" because she, as Toril Moi argues, "refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, has a story to tell in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (qtd. in Manisty, 153). [39]

Several parties contribute to silence this emerging voice. Whenever Sayyida tries to tell the story of the newly discovered voice to anyone (the husband, the grocer, or even the psychiatrist) she is simply dismissed as mad or under psychological strain. Sayyida, unlike Aida and the women in the Convent did not find a supporter; was not a part of a sisterhood that would give her narrative the required validation to resist surrendering to social rules once more.

Consequently Sayyida cannot continue with her rebellion. She surrenders to her designated role as mother and wife. The disappearance of the new voice indicates her defeat: "she was surprised to hear the old voice . . . . weak and hoarse and devoid of any beauty, clarity or strength. . . the face she had known in times past. She gave a bitter smile, shaking her head with sorrow, then took up the two boxes of pills to flush them down the lavatory" (70/172). Hoda El Sadda argues that this last act of Sayyida is of defiance

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[39] Toril Moi *Sexual, Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory.* London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

“against the strategies of oppression used by institutions of authority which stigmatize any individual who threatens to question or dislocate the status quo with the label ‘mad’” (20). However, Sayyida’s resistance here is against insanity, not an oppressive society; she does not want to be labeled “mad” or descend literally into madness and the price she has to pay is to give up her new discovered voice / self and once more play by the rules of the dominant discourse.

Rasheed el-Enany, on the other hand, argues that Sayyida is like Kareema in “Thirty-One Beautiful Green Trees;” “[she] surrender[s] . . not on the terms of society, not by conforming and submitting, but by total withdrawal on [her] own terms through madness” (387). But while Kareema insisted on confronting the tyranny of society until she disappears into madness, Sayyida, alternatively, (re)surrenders to the dominant social rules, daring to challenge society’s rigidity. Sayyida, like Kareema, lacks those who may support her narrative and encourage her to pursue her newly found beauty:

> she discovered . . . . that she had not a single friend, no human being with whom she was intimate, nobody close to her heart, apart from her mother and sister. Both of whom she had . . regarded as not being suitable . . . . were she to tell them of the matter it would be an attitude of scorn (65/169).[40]

Sayyida’s narrative is not a healing one because it lacks the necessary support and validation a healing narrative requires. Had she continued to challenge those who surround her, she would have ended up like Kareema, in a mental institution. Sayyida’s defeat marks the power of the grand narrative and those who control it. However, her attempt at resistance puts her with Patricia Best in that state between healing and psychological

[40] Note how Salwa Bakr always blames the female figures in the family before the males as in the case of Hinna in *The Golden Chariot* and Kareema in “Thirty-One Beautiful Green Trees.” Both cases accentuate the dilemma of internalizing the values of the dominant discourse within the patriarchy that prevent a family from becoming a supportive entity to a traumatized female member.

defeat.

Bakr, however, does not put the entire blame for women's condition on men; rather, she blames society with its different institutions and its worn out traditions. In "The Rhetoric of the Have-nots," Ferial Ghazoul argues that Salwa Bakr refuses to isolate the case of women from that of men or society as a whole. She maintains that

> The emancipation of women would not be achieved through external indicators but rather through the change of practices, relationships, and sensitivities. Thus she represents in her works human patterns . . . as a clue to reexamine both the self and the standards in order to reevaluate the role of women, the structure of society, and the function of art. ("Have-nots," 242)[41]

Both Bakr and Morrison, like their protagonists, are healers whose concern is the welfare of society as a whole and not only its women. Morrison and Bakr speak through those who narrate and those who encourage the narrative as a healing device.

Not all narratives cause the required healing effect; therefore both writers highlight the role of others in giving validation to the traumatic narrative and its conversion to a healing process. They both hail the sisterhood formed between these wounded women as they find it rather essential in causing a psychological healing. This bond defies the traditional historical view of the relationship between women that they are "natural enemies [who] cannot bond with one another" (hooks, 127). Without such encouragement from a supportive group from either characters or readers the narrative loses its ability to heal and the subject finds it simpler to withdraw her narrative or even burn it altogether, as Patricia Best preferred to do, because she then would be certain of its erasure in the face of a dominant narrative.

Morrison and Bakr invent and reinvent new techniques in their writings that prove

[41] Translation from Arabic is my own.

that there is more than one possible narrative, discourse, and reality. These techniques also challenge the literary traditions of the genre and help releasing it from the prejudices classic language and techniques still bear.

Conclusion

"The subaltern cannot speak . . . Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish."

-Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

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

-Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation"

Toni Morrison and Salwa Bakr choose to resist the hegemony and rigidity of one grand narrative through writing. They both dared to tread on social taboos and other worn traditions that form the boundaries of what is antinarratable and enforce a silence on the voices and multiple stories of their fellow women.

Morrison and Bakr, as women intellectuals, resist the status quo through telling fresh and new stories rather than the usual narratives dominating their respective societies. Through their writings, they offer an example for others to narrate disregarding the constraints forced on their voices. They choose the novel as a literary medium to express their new narratives as through this genre they may manipulate the social and literary traditions, and indeed language itself, into new mediums free from the prejudices that were attached to them throughout history. The novel's dialogic nature, as Mikhail Bakhtin argues, allows for multiplicity of voices to emerge and at the same time incorporates "heteroglossia" which is a variety of "socio-ideological languages of social groups" that defy the official language of power and authority again that Bakhtin describes as "a single

unitary language" (262-3).[42] Both qualities challenge the concept of one grand narrative and encourage a diversity of counternarratives.

The antinarratable experience is of a traumatic nature which society considers "inappropriate" to tell fearing that it may shake the constructed social order. Thus, such counternarratives are severely dismissed by society, labeling them as either hysterical and mad, or inappropriate and immoral. The subtle process of properly revealing the antinarrative requires support and validation. Without support the narrative would be prematurely aborted: a fantasy would remain a mad person's delusions, a hysterical narrative would continue to be nothing but meaningless fragments, and even a consistent narrative would be questioned and ultimately discredited. The healing effect that a narrative may cause a traumatic narrator would disappear and consequently the narrator would find herself either forced to revert to her defeated status and remain there forever, or stay in the grey line that separate healing from non-healing.

Both Morrison and Bakr highlight the idea of a supportive group that embraces the traumatic person and gives credit and validation to her antinarrative. This support may come from a sisterhood that replaces the family which failed the victim of trauma, or even from the readers themselves whom the narrator is addressing and asking for their support. However, in their works the function of narrative is not only limited to healing, it rather helps the narrator as much as the reader to understand the dynamics of society, thus enables them to have a clearer vision of their present based on the history of their societies. Narrative, in that case, offers help to the author herself; a therapeutic act that finds validation through her intended recipients. Narrative becomes vital to the author herself as much as her characters and readers.

[42] Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia was applied to African American studies by some critics such as Dorothy J. Hale, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, and Henry Louis Gates.

Morrison and Bakr are present in their respective texts through a certain character who represents either the healer, the shaman who helps the traumatic person with putting together the fragments of her narrative and thus transfers the act of narrating into a healing process; or through the narrator who is in need to understand her present through surveying the past thus she narrates and shares her experience with the readers. Both types move towards an act of revealing the "unspeakable." As Robyn Warhol puts it: "what has been repressed or suppressed because it shouldn't be told, gets expressed before the novel's end because it must be told for healing to occur and, for that matter, for the novel to get written" (224). This will simultaneously encourage the reader to act in the same way and learn to daringly narrate her antinarrative regardless of society's reservations.

Both authors understand their roles in articulating the marginalized women of their respective societies because centuries of oppression have rendered these narratives antinarratable. Morrison and Bakr draw attention to their places, along with other women, in the margins of their societies. They rather celebrate being there as this position allows them to manipulate, rather than blindly follow, the dominant discourse. Bakr, along with other postmodern women writers, seems to agree with Morrison when she says: "I'm gonna stay out here on the margin, and let the center look for me" (Interview A, 20).

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