

NATIONAL ALLEGORIES, PERSONAL STORIES:
THE USE OF DOMESTIC NARRATIVES IN INDIA AND ALGERIA

By

MOHANALAKSHMI RAJAKUMAR

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To David,
Who is never afraid to ask what a word means.
You are my model for intellectual curiosity.

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By

Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar

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This project focuses on differences in nationalist discourse regarding women and the way female writers conceptualized the experience of women in three contexts. These three contexts are: the middle class Muslim reform movement, the Algerian revolution, and the Partition of India. During each of these periods male scholars, politicians, and revolutionaries discussed women and their behavior, bodies, and dress. The ideology common throughout these disparate events was that women were best served when they were ensconced within their homes and governed by male family members. Threat to national identity was often linked to the preservation of womanly purity. Yet for the writers of this study, Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991), Assia Djebar (1936-), and Khadija Mastur (1927-1982), the danger to women was not in the public sphere, but within a domestic hierarchy enforced by male privilege.

In their fictional texts, each writer shows how women resist, subvert, and challenge the normative behaviors prescribed in masculine discourse. They highlight the different ways women negotiate their own agency, however limited, among expectations of colonialism and native patriarchy. These texts demonstrate distinct literary viewpoints of nation, home, and women's experiences at particular historical moments.

The ensuing chapters include examinations of short stories within the frames of specific time periods: colonial India during the 1930s, the Algerian revolution from 1954-1962, and the Partition of India in 1947. The specific texts reveal how fiction provided a socio-cultural space for female writers to contest traditional systems of power. Selected stories focus on the voices and experiences of women who existed as limited cultural icons in the nationalist discourse.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In the early twentieth century, women's bodies and behaviors became points of national and communal identity in India and Algeria. The writings of Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991), Khadija Mastur (1927-1982), and Assia Djébar (1936-), however, resist the emblematic notions of woman as nation or woman as cultural signifier, during significant periods in the national histories of their countries. Through visceral descriptions of daily life in a hierarchal household, the three writers respond to symbolic and physical disempowerment of women who exist in a patriarchal family. At the center of their narratives are female characters struggling to establish selfhood or gain a measure of autonomy within ideologies that privilege masculine dominance.

Ideas about the home and home life are central to the narratives included in this study. Reading the texts together exposes different ways in which domesticity was articulated during three very distinct moments. Much of the discourse in India and Algeria focused on outside or public influence as corrosive. Yet Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur overturn this notion by configuring dissent that originates from within the home. In their presentations of unruly and misbehaving residents, the writers separate their female characters from the images promoted in mainstream discourse. By claiming their sexuality, refusing to marry, and being dissatisfied with the status quo, women become disruptive--destabilizing their homes and making them "unhomely," or "uncanny" (Patel 131-158). In essence, they cleave their households from the traditionalist domestic frame.

During the nationalist movements in India and Algeria, women were increasingly defined as preservers of cultural authenticity, familial honor, and domestic stability. Indian and Algerian nationalists promoted the idea of the pure, domestic, asexual woman, whose conduct never transcended the well-established parameters of the middle-class household. In India, the

positioning of women inside the home created “the most illustrious symbol of orthodox privacy” whereby women became silent figures—figures that were discussed but could never speak for themselves (Devji 22-36). They were constrained and invisible to the public sphere.

As Anne McClintock explains, “all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite nationalism’s ideological investment in the idea of popular unity, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender difference” (McClintock 61). The texts of Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur demonstrate this semblance of domestic normalcy integral to the nationalist view of women. This view ideologized women as chaste, virtuous residents of the home. The confluence of home, family, and community in women’s lives in colonial India, the Algerian Revolution, and the first few months of the creation of Pakistan, show home and family exerting powerful influences on the relationship between women and their societies. McClintock explains that “[t]he family as a metaphor offered a single genesis narrative for national history while, at the same time, the family as an institution became void of history and excluded from national power” (McClintock 62). The family became an engendered socio-cultural matrix, and family life became a critical paradigm.

The short stories in this study articulate the extent to which women accept or resist the constraints placed upon them by their families and communities. I focus on the ways in which these writers explore women’s coping strategies in the midst of social forces that increasingly define their sense of self within the physical boundary of the home and the figurative border of the companionate marriage. I am particularly interested in the domestic and social arrangements explored in these narratives. These domestic and social frames are a way of understanding the competing forces that shaped women’s notions of self. As represented in Chughtai’s work on upper middle class households in India, the texts shows a forward movement from narratives of

stability and traditionalism to lives lived on the fringes of the movement for Algerian independence in Djébar's narratives, and the consequences of communal violence in Partition stories by Mastur. These writers demonstrate continuous expectations for women's traditional behavior even amongst shifting social forces. In the midst of these social and national expectations, women were ensconced in the private space within themselves.

This emphasis on family as a unit of social hierarchy was a primary strategy of the Muslim cultural and nationalist resistance in India and Algeria. It was also a means to control women's behavior in the home (Kandiyoti 10). In India during the late 1930s and 1940s, and in Algeria during the late 1950s, Muslim life embraced the family unit as an embodiment of the minority community's self-expression within the dominant cultures of British and French colonialism. Women came to represent the "inner sanctum" for the subcommunity; the housewife became central to the nationalist resistance to external threats, and the internal promotion of cultural identity (Kandiyoti 10). McClintock's reading of family as an organizing social principle is useful to this discussion:

The family offered an indispensable figure for sanctioning social *hierarchy* within a putative *organic unity* of interests. Since the subordination of woman to man, and child to adult, was deemed a natural fact, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature. The family image was thus drawn on to figure *hierarchy within unity* as an "organic" element of historical progress, and thereby became indispensable for legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within non-familial (affiliative) social formations such as nationalism. (64)

As McClintock explains, the family becomes a repository for nationalist ideals of social behavior. Family life serves as a stage for behavioral control and meting out punishment to transgressing members. In this context, women play subordinate roles reinforced by sexist and paternalistic attitudes. This role equates them with other minority groups *vis-à-vis* the homogenous nation. Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur address the patriarchal family as a privileged structure, predicated on masculine social seniority in Muslim society. They strive to disrupt the

ideology that stable domestic life depends solely on well-behaved wives by showing the unpunished failures of male family members. The stories uncover the failed promises of security and stability as misbehaving husbands and extended family members police young housewives and mothers, often against their will.

Women's bodies became emblems of familial honor. Women were required to keep their sexuality for their husbands alone. Their bodies became the boundary marker between public life and the private cultural values defined by their nation. The privileges of men in family hierarchy allowed husbands, fathers, and brothers to exert social and sexual control over female family members in the hope of fashioning them into chaste and pure women at the family's center (Khan 464). Without making women into heroes or archetypal figures, each of the writers responds to these issues by challenging normative definitions of womanhood. The three writers promote women's voices as a means of showing the complexity in women's experiences as wives and daughters. All three seek to disrupt the notion of domestic harmony by recovering women's social and sexual choices in the Muslim family (Singerman 468).

The texts in this study adopt Rosemary Marangoly George's approach and consider home as a functional socio-literary concept. I use George's ideas to explore how the writers interrogate home as a material and theoretical construct. According to George, the home is no longer a neutral or private place. Instead, it is, as Diane Singerman suggests, a space for "intense ideological negotiation" (Singerman 468). Thus, the ability of a writer to create an imagined interior is a public act: "imagining a home is as political an act as imagining a nation" (George 3). She insists that literature about the home should look beyond mimetic domestic representation. It should refuse stereotypical readings of the home as an exclusively private space: "as imagined in fiction, "home" is a desire that is fulfilled or denied in varying measure to

the subjects (both fictional characters and readers) constructed by the narrative. As such, “home” moves on several axes . . .” (George 2). Further, George argues that depictions of the home can formulate and contest stances on gender and class identities:

The basic organizing principle around which the notion of “home” is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive. Home, along with gender/sexuality, race, and class, acts as an ideological determinant of the subject. . . . “home” is built on select inclusions grounded in a learned (or taught) sense of kinship that is extended to those who are perceived as sharing the same blood, race, class, gender, or religion. Membership is maintained by bonds of love, fear, power, desire and control. (9)

Rosemary Marangoly George’s representation of the home as a site of movement provides the framework for this study. What are the dimensions of relationships within the home? How do these dimensions frame the social and economic aspects of women’s lives? What does home life tell us about the individual female citizen within the nation? Read in this context, domestic life is concerned with issues related to, but often not thought of in conjunction with, nationalism including faith, marriage, and personal happiness. These issues reveal home as an exclusive ideological space where membership is determined by social practices including marriage, class, hierarchy, and kinship. Both in literature and as a practical function, home exists as a sphere of influence in a web of constantly intersecting and evolving interactions between its residents.

In placing the home and home life at the center of their texts, Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur break the enforced silence of wives, mothers, and daughters. They depict female characters in motion. These characters actively desire, pursue, and strive for their own individual interests above those of the family or nation (Patel 135). They resist the version of history presented in official documents and other public discourses that failed to capture the complexity of women’s daily lives. While their nations were turned outward and focused on the encroachment of colonial power, the three writers turned inward to uncover the home as a site of complex power negotiations--a place where women’s bodies and sexuality were appropriated by the extended

family. The home was a place where women wrestled with the demands of the social world. The writers show that women's relationships with other household members were framed by the socio-cultural setting of family and they expose the superficial depictions of domestic life by male writers. Each writer responds to the significant socio-political events of her time through literature. It was literature that provided a vehicle for discussing taboo subjects including women's sexual discovery, violence against women, and forced marriages. Their emphasis on women as conscious actors in everyday settings, or the converse—the regimenting of male privilege which undermines any possibility of women's autonomy—are efforts to reclaim and contest circulating notions about women's experiences.

Chughtai, Djebbar, and Mastur expose the myth of tradition as a safe harbor for well-behaved women by showing the debilitating consequences of patriarchal definitions of women's roles. These patriarchal definitions had serious effects on the mental, emotional, and physical health of women. The texts examine how the domestication of women through marriage embeds gendered behavior within the everyday life of the home. In writing about home life, each author dissects the ways in which daily practices reveal women's engagement with familial, communal, and national expectations. In making the domestic their chief concern, the writers co-opt domestic narratives, stories about relationships, family crises, and scandals, to show the interconnections of gender, marriage, and desire. Thus, they contest the prevailing logic of the domestic as private, unpolluted, and different from public activity (which is considered pernicious or corrosive) (Patel 135). Each works against contemporary frames that constitute female subjectivity in their respective societies in an effort to realign perceptions of women's social exclusion, personal desire, and individual agency. They empower women's voices in the space assigned to Muslim women in traditions that fashioned an idealized family life as an

analogue for the nation (Najamabadi 91). The narratives that emerge present the home as a site of complex identity negotiations where a woman's lived experience challenges static conceptualizations of the acquiescent, well-behaved Muslim woman.

The focus on daily life within the home is a purposeful one, both for the writers and for this study. I use the notion of "domestic" for an expanded reading of the home, as suggested by Mezei and Briganti: "...domestic space implies more than houses and gardens (or the liminal spaces of garden gate, doorstep, porch, garage) Domestic space implies the everyday, the rituals of domesticity in their cyclical, repetitive ordinariness" (837-836). By examining the struggles of female characters against the backdrop of daily life, each writer offers a unique interpretation of Muslim domesticity in a specific socio-historical period, rupturing the home as an icon or a site of undisturbed cultural preservation (Schultheis 52). I examine nation, family, and citizen as related concepts that constitute the frame of women's daily experiences inside the home.

Marriage functions as a deeply normative practice in Muslim society. Non-normative marriages, however, occupy central thematic positions in many of the stories in this study (Bhabha 141-153). Marriage and familial reproduction become the means by which women are contained and prevented from displaying behavior that could lead to dishonor or violate taboos. Deniz Kandiyoti articulates the link between marriage and motherhood in Muslim societies: "The young bride enters her husband's household as an effectively dispossessed individual who can establish her place in the patriline only by producing male offspring" (Kandiyoti 279). She uses the term "classic patriarchy" to define the actions of male family members who arrange unions for younger female family members: "Under classic patriarchy, girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband's father. There, they are

subordinate not only to all the men but also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-law” (278). Kandiyoti’s definition applies to many of the marriage scenarios depicted in the stories studied here; these stories detail the marriages, motherhood, and socialization of the young female character of various households.

As a means of exposing the patriarchal power, Chughtai and Djebbar problematize marriage in their texts. Women are pressured to become wives and mothers not only by male family members, but also by female family members who conspire to domesticate their sisters and sisters-in-law. Women are placed within marriage, in many cases forcibly, as a way of reminding them of their social responsibilities. The absence of family, as in Mastur’s stories about the violent period preceding India’s independence, proves devastating for women. Without the patriarchal shield, women’s bodies become battleground between warring communities.

Each of the writers studied here offers texts which resist patriarchal control of women’s desires, bodies, and choices in significant socio-historical moments. They demonstrate how definitions of appropriate behavior for women were manipulated to serve the interests of the nation, thereby constraining personal desires or ambitions. The female characters illustrate the various strategies women use to resist social mores. Kandiyoti terms these negotiations “patriarchal bargain(s):”

Women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what I will term the *patriarchal bargain* of any given society, which may exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity. These patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women’s gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. They also influence both the potential for and specific forms of women’s active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression. Moreover, patriarchal bargains are not timeless or immutable entities, but are susceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between genders. (Kandiyoti 275)

The means by which women create their own spaces varies from nation to nation, but also depends on other factors including class.

Muslim Women in Colonial India: The Importance of the Proper Housewife

In colonial India, the home became the center of a socio-cultural struggle between Hindu nationalists and British colonists. For anti-colonial nationalists, reclaiming the body and behavior of the Hindu housewife became central to recovering respect for traditional values and overcoming “colonial shame.” For Muslims seeking to embrace a more modern identity, the Muslim housewife was a person underexposed to reform and education and became the subject of reform manuals (Amin 31). At the confluence of these three influences and interests were Indian women, particularly middle-class housewives.

From the late nineteenth century onward, British reform focused on Hindu social practices including widow immolation (known as *sati*), widow remarriage, and the age of consent for marriage. These social practices created a discourse around the high-caste Hindu woman (Chatterjee 25). The British used widow burning and child marriage as examples of the barbaric nature of the native culture. Social reform became the rationale for British presence in the subcontinent. The abuse of women became an argument against the colony’s readiness for self-rule. Criticism of male treatment of women established British moral authority and highlighted the inability of Indian men to protect their women from abuse (Metcalf, “Reading and Writing” 2). British reforms came as legislative prohibitions against *sati* in 1829 and the legalization of widow remarriage in 1856. These new laws demonstrated the ability of the civilizing British influence to counter damaging traditional practices (Mookerjea-Lenoard 5). The British attempted to identify practices symbolic of indigenous culture. Partha Chatterjee explains how the British rhetoric established a Hindu overtone to cultural discussion on the subcontinent:

It was colonialist discourse, that by assuming the hegemony of Brahmanical religious texts and the complete submission of all Hindus to the dictates of those texts, defined the tradition that was to be criticized and reformed. (Chatterjee 119)

The figure of the middle-class Hindu Bengali housewife was at the center of the discussions about Indian domestic life and culture. The British move to reclaim Hindu widows and return them to society destabilized the patriarchal foundation of the Hindu home.

As Indian nationalists combated British reform movements, the Indo-Muslim community engaged in internal reform. Discussion of Muslim family and home life appeared in religious novels and household manuals written by male social reformers. One such social reformer was Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1863-1943), who wrote extensively on the proper behavior for women. These texts became vehicles for ideas on domesticity and women's roles. Handbooks and novels were filled with suggestions for household management and advice on relating to one's in-laws. The publishing of these manuals from the late nineteenth century onward confirmed the Muslim community's need to regain influence over daily life in the face of colonial encroachment (Walsh 52).

An elite Muslim Urdu-speaking population emerged in the upper provinces of India. This Muslim sector had a communal identity distinct from that of the Hindu majority. The forerunner of these efforts was the Aligarh movement (1858-1898) whose founder, Sayid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), advocated the uplifting of the Muslim bourgeoisie through education. Khan's chief interest, safeguarding Muslim interests in the face of British mistrust and Hindu oversight, defined a key role for privileged, upper-middle-class Muslims. This key role was to challenge stereotypes about Muslims as a backward and uneducated people.

The culmination of Khan's efforts to increase Muslim male participation in public discourse was the establishment of the Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College (1875).¹ This college was styled after England's Oxford and Cambridge Universities. By melding Islamic

¹ Now known as Aligarh Muslim University.

principles with the traditions of Western education, Khan intended to prepare students for roles as government officials in the colonial state.

As the seeds for a separatist Muslim state were being planted in such institutions as Khan's college, a different set of identity politics for the improvement of Muslim women emerged.² The Muslim home became a socio-political space where India's largest sub-community could preserve a unique sense of cultural specificity. At the center of this home was the figure of the Muslim housewife. The Muslim housewife was the perpetuator of cultural values and tradition, and the visible marker of difference through the practices of veiling and gender segregation. For reformers, domestic narratives of middle-class life could be reconstructed as morality tales in novels. These mostly male writers developed texts, intended for female readers, which had women narrators telling stories of morality to other female characters.

These instructions for creating the proper Muslim woman began circulating in the female quarters of Muslim houses. For example, *Nazir Ahmed's Mirat ul` Urus* (The Bride's Mirror, 1869) was a didactic treatise on the need for educating women to be better citizens. (A female protagonist embodied his idealized woman.) (Ali 123). Following Ahmad's text were a number of novels aimed at women's reform through the promotion of education. Atlat Hussain Hali, known as Hali, wrote *Majalis Un-Nissa* (Assemblies of Women, 1874) as the prototype for the ideal Muslim housewife. Most of this narrative consists of conversations between Atuji and her female relatives. Hali's work was a hallmark in the development of Urdu prose; his use of female

² For further reading on Khan, the Aligarh movement, or Muslim separatism see: P.G. Robb, "Muslim Identity and Separatism in India: The Significance of M.A. Ansari," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54.1 (1991): 104-125; David Lelyveld, "Disenchantment at Aligarh: Islam and the Realm of the Secular in Late Nineteenth Century India," *Die Welt des Islams* 22. 1.4 (1982): 85-102.

vernacular established a precedent for Urdu writers interested in exploring the idiom of upper-middle-class women.

One of the writers interested in exploring the idiom of upper-middle class woman was Ismat Chughtai. In contrast to the images of domesticity in Muslim reform manuals and novels, Chughtai opened the domestic space as a place where the term “good behavior” was contested, avoided, or reconfigured. Her stories created spaces for female desire and autonomy. By exploring the corruption of the pure woman inside the Muslim home, she questioned the gendered space and role of middle-class Muslim women.

The Algerian Resistance: Non-Combat Women within the Family Fold

In the seven years of the entrenched and bloody Algerian resistance movement, the home was a microcosm of the struggle against French colonial rule. All household members were assigned roles through which they could further the revolutionary cause. The longtime French rule increasingly threatened Islamic culture and education. Colonial influence eroded not only Arab and Muslim identity, but also the ability of the colonizers to see the colony as a separate entity from the French nation. Most of the prime land was occupied by the *ped noirs* (European settlers) who established themselves within Algeria. These settlers had their own culture and identity. The presence of French citizens ensured that Algeria was thought of as an integral part of France, but with no rights of citizenship extended towards the colonized. Beginning in 1847, resistance movements attempted to reject French rule in Algeria, but were swiftly put down (Revere 477-468).

For a while, resistance to French domination was exclusively military. The intellectuals in the Young Algerian Movement (1910-1930), however, tried assimilation into mainstream French politics as a platform for reform. They were frustrated in their attempts to persuade

French intellectuals of the need for Algerian participation in French politics. Eventually, the Young Algerians were overtaken by those calling for more drastic measures.

New forms of resistance appeared in the 1930s as native intellectuals began arguing for French citizenship. Intellectuals such as Ferhat Abbas (1899-1985) advocated recognition for the colony based on its ties to the French mainland. He sought French citizenship for small numbers of Algerians. Having been educated in French schools and having lived in France, Abbas saw himself primarily as French. He insisted these experiences made him and others like him part of France. Abbas' views resonated in part with the French opinion that the colony was an extension of their country. His fellow resistance fighters, however, found his measures to be too moderate and claimed he was pandering to the colonizers.

The fragmentary nature of the Algerian colony soon became evident when Messali Hadj (1898-1974) emerged as a leader for a populist and Islamist nation. The split between the modern secularists and popular Islamists grew as it became clear that the French would not accept the idea of being a minority in independent Algeria. The movement from assimilation toward radical nationalism was soon followed by demands for a revolution. By 1954, Hadj was sidestepped by younger nationalists and the decision to use force was identified as a unifying principle for the masses. November 1, 1954 marked the start of a revolution; the committees, cliques, and clans were governed by a collective leadership whose purpose was a freed Arab-Islamic Algerian state. As the revolutionary movement proceeded, however, it became clear that uniting Islamists, Berbers, Arabs, peasants, and intellectuals would be more complex than anyone had predicted (Revere 477). In the face of French refusal to grant independence, the resistance began urban guerilla warfare, causing civilian casualties. As a result, French retaliation became violent.

In this war-ridden and political backdrop, Liberation became a unifying goal for the factions of the resistance. The F.L.N. (National Liberation Party) forged a unified identity by encouraging people to see themselves as Muslims aligning against the oppressive French *colons*. In doing so, the F.L.N. emerged as the central political party, a militant faction capable of mobilizing the population. The F.L.N.'s ambivalence toward women's involvement in the resistance was evident in its lack of formal mechanisms for women's contribution to the war. Women were seen as supporters of war efforts rather than leaders or active members; they were largely used in civilian service areas (providing food, clothing and shelter or serving as nurses for male members). Although the F.L.N. had some women act as messengers and discard their traditional veils for Western clothing, the majority of women remained at home, in their traditional roles as wives and mothers. They were expected to maintain stability in the face of increasing violence against civilians on both sides.

The F.L.N.'s primary mouthpiece, the newspaper *El Moujahid*, printed articles and documents focused on perpetuating support for the war and combating French efforts to win over the public. Published F.L.N. documents such as the Soumman Platform (1956) explicitly discuss women's position as secondary to national interests. The Soumman Platform lists "The Women's Movement" last after "rural people, workers, the young, intellectuals, tradespeople, and craftsmen" (Revere 477). F.L.N. publications publicly demarcated women as supporters, not fighters, in the revolution: "It is therefore, possible, in keeping with the moral value of the Algerian people to relegate the following duties to women:

- The moral support of fighters and members of the resistance
- Giving instructions, dealing with the provisions and providing refuge
- Helping the families and children of the maquisards [rebels], prisoners, or other detainees" (Lareg 150).

Newspapers, training manuals, and concept position papers of the time constitute the F.L.N. revealing deep ambivalence towards women's roles in Algerian society. The F.L.N.'s position as the penultimate freedom fighters' party solidified its importance as an ideological influencer. There was a drastic difference between the F.L.N.'s calls to action, which clearly defined the roles and titles given to fighters, and the ambiguous references to a future independent state with general promises of a better life. In this ambivalent haze, women and their roles, behaviors, and experiences were left chasing the promises of freedom in the new state (Lareg 151).

Much of Djébar's early work was written in the aftermath of the Algerian Revolution when former mobile female freedom fighters were expected to return to the roles of stationary domestics. Her writing exposes gaps in the revolutionary ideology of the F.L.N. and its conceptions of women's roles in society. Djébar questions the definitions of women's behavior during the revolutionary period and after the country's independence. Her female characters wrestle with contradictions of women's roles. These contradictions were evident by a small female mobile fighting force and the majority of women who were expected to maintain the dictates of tradition within the family.

The Partition of India: Women's Bodies Embody Men's Honor

The transitional period leading to the Partition of India (August 1947) saw liberation from British colonialism, the birth of the Indian nation, and the creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan. Overnight, neighbors became enemies resulting from new religiously defined boundaries. These boundaries sparked conflicting emotions among millions of people in transition--emotions of joy for nationhood and fear for safety. A migration of unprecedented proportions occurred as Hindus and Muslims attempted to cross demarcated areas. Many left their life-long communities to relocate to a place where they could be part of a religious majority. According to estimates, "In 1941 there were 94.5 million Muslims and 270.2 million

Hindus in the subcontinent. Muslims comprised 24.3 percent of the total population and Hindus 69.5 percent” (Davis 257). The dispersed nature of the Muslim population made the journey to Pakistan’s borders an arduous and divisive process:

Forty percent of all Muslims (38 million) lived outside the two clusters of Muslim-dominated districts; and these districts contained 20.2 million non-Muslims, representing more than one fourth of their total population. These two facts indicate the great demographic obstacle to the establishment of Pakistan. (Davis 258)

Attacks on trains full of people fleeing from one area to another and on minority members of communities, fueled by rumors and inflammatory news reports, escalated the violence. The home as a social building block was dissolved both physically and metaphorically; families abandoned their properties and members were separated, left behind, abducted, or killed in the confusing rush to safety. (Talbot 37)

In this scramble across the subcontinent, women’s bodies became targets for opposing communities to exert dominance or retaliate for injuries suffered. Women of all religious communities embodied the new religiously-based political boundaries between the two nations; acts on individual Hindu and Muslim women became substitutions for attacks on the entire nation. Many female survivors of violence were unable to return to their families, which resulted in permanent alterations to the family structure. Later, hundreds of women were forcibly reunited with their families after living with their abductors. These reconciliations were often difficult because they had been intimate, either willingly or unwillingly, with men of another religious community. Many women were accepted only at the state’s urging, some were rejected, and others chose to live in homes for women rather than face rejection.

After Partition, the governments of India and Pakistan undertook a reintegration and repatriation of sexually violated women. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin’s study thoroughly documents the difficulties encountered by women who were forcibly returned to their previous communities. The Inter-Dominion Agreement of November 1947 was signed in an effort to find abducted women as quickly as possible. The years between 1947 and 1949 became known as the

“recovery period” during which both states attempted to reinstate their former citizens in their originating communities (67). The criteria for determining who was abducted and in need of help were clear:

(a) “abducted person” means a male child under the age of sixteen years or a female of whatever age who is, or immediately before the 1st day of March 1947, was, a Muslim and who, on or after that day and before the 1st day of January 1949, had become separated from his or her family and is found to be living with or under the control of any other individual or family, and in the latter cases includes a child born to any such female after the said date. (71)

Given the recent bloodshed, it is significant that the states agreed on the necessity to reclaim their female citizens. It records first-person accounts of recovery workers, survivors, and family members of abused women. Many women were not welcomed into their former homes and many family members refused to recognize their wives, sisters, and daughters. Whole communities tried to disassociate from these women because the women were seen as a loss of honor.

Mastur’s work differs from other Partition literature because it particularizes the overwhelming number of assaults on women. She incorporates events that lead to violence and shows the effects of these events on both men and women. In short, she exposes the failure of the patriarchal family to protect women, and the ways the family structure and ideology dooms women to be recipients of violence.

Multiple Narratives in Short Fiction

I use the term “Muslim” as an analytical socio-political category. The use of “Muslim” instead of “Arab” or “South Asian” is deliberate: I seek to examine women’s writings outside the commonly used geographic boundaries that structure the Islamic world—the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Instead, the word “Muslim” denotes a unique socio-cultural phenomenon colored by political and religious maneuvering. Analyzing texts by female authors from India, Algeria, and Pakistan proves to be an insightful study of the counter-hegemonic practices

employed by Muslim women writers. This analysis is an effort to flesh out similarities of these writers' discourse. The intent is not to create a generalized view in which the experiences of women in these countries are seen as equal. Rather, it is to find the trends in women's writing that respond to moments of national significance in India, Algeria, and Pakistan. Comparing strategies of resistance used by the female characters in these narratives gives rise to a nuanced view of the range of issues facing women in Muslim societies.

The short story form is critical to this study because short story collections demonstrate a writer's ability to treat recurring themes in a variety of ways. Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur utilize this form to create multiple individual investigations that re-interpret women's experiences. These multiple narratives capture individuals in their everyday lives; they expose how daily actions demonstrate the contradictions, ambiguities, and disavowal of familial and marital authority (Khan 466). Female characters show a range of possibilities for women, rather than confirming images of passivity and blind acceptance of their fate. These short-story narratives explore women's positions and functions alongside the socially-constructed power inequalities of their environments. Minute acts of resistance produce supplementary spaces wherein women negotiate alternative behaviors. Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur generate tales of familial failure due to the inability of family members to support the autonomy of their young women. Their stories illustrate tensions in family life caused by female members who refuse to adhere to proper codes of conduct and the resulting attempts at enforcement. Enforcement of proper conduct to unruly women is often perpetrated by multiple family members. These "misbehaving" women attempt, with varying degrees of success, to re-inscribe daily life by their autonomous choices. In this study, I will examine the local, material, and historical concerns of

each text to reveal how the writers expose the gaps in familial control over women's psycho-sexual identities.

An iconoclastic figure, Ismat Chughtai emerged from the ranks of India's Progressive Writers Movement (PWA, 1935) as one of its most widely read female writers. For Chughtai, the female space of the upper-middle-class Muslim home, the *zenana*, was the originating space for the ideal housewife. Before Chughtai, PWA writers used fiction to explore the effects of tradition, social convention, and class on the poor and underprivileged. She was one of the first writers to shift focus towards upper-middle-class females and domestic hierarchies. The PWA's *Manifesto* mobilized Indian writers against social conventions that disadvantaged the poor and lower classes (Hafeez 651). The group formalized a tradition of critical and realistic investigations of religion, class, and taboo in everyday life. The movement was "inescapably committed to social transformation and nation building," which it hoped to achieve by generating art to redefine cultural production and social debate (Gopal 2). The aims of the organization, adopted during its first conference in 1935, promised a vigilant approach to literature:

It is the duty of the Indian writes to give expression to the changes in Indian life and to assist the spirit of progress in the country by introducing scientific rationalism in literature. They should undertake to develop an attitude of literary criticism which will discourage the general reactionary and revivalist tendencies on questions like family, religion, sex, war and society, and to combat literary trends reflecting communalism, racial antagonism, sexual libertinism, and exploitation of man by man. (Hafeez 651)

Chughtai introduced the upper-middle-class Muslim home into mainstream Urdu literature. Her stories about misbehaving husbands and wives expose the limitations of traditional gender roles. She brings these subjects into a body of literature created during the 1930s and 1940s when Muslim reformers were focused on promoting the identity of their subcommunity. As Jamal Malik says, "On the one hand, the *Bhishti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments) written by the well-known Muslim scholar, Sufi and divine-Ashraf Ali Thanawi (d. 1943) suggested conventional

middle class manners to the Muslim female. On the other hand, there were the so-called “progressives” (Menon 76). Thanawi and Chughtai were both members of the Urdu-speaking northern elite, yet their approaches to defining social spaces for women were markedly different. An analysis of these two texts, Thanawi’s exhortations to women and Chughtai’s depictions of women’s actions, reveals the home as a central site of interest for north Indian Muslim discourse. The Muslim home is a site of cultural preservation as it was impenetrable to colonial or Hindu influences. The person at the center of the home, the housewife, was examined, instructed, and expected to be the guardian of Muslim traditions.

Chughtai’s narrators are members of the households they observe. They are often young female family members who report the unusual behavior of the adults around them. She uses flashbacks to detail challenging moments of the narrative: through a child’s memories, the non-traditional behaviors of aunts, uncles, brothers, and sister-in-laws are examined. The perspective of the adult narrator, working within her childhood memories, prevents Chughtai from naming specific abusive behavior in the texts. Instead, she plays with the sense of time and moves towards revealing the narrator’s own complicity in the main action. The short stories “The Quilt” and “The Rock” demonstrate cultural and economic implications of absorbing poor women into the family narrative. In both stories, poor young girls are married to rich, older men by their families in order to ensure their lifelong socio-economic stability (Menon 76). In my reading of these stories, I examine the intersection of unrestrained male privilege and patriarchal marriage on women’s lives within the home.

Assia Djebar reclaims women’s memories of the Algerian Revolution and explores these experiences outside the nation’s lens. Her chief concern is the politicization of the Algerian woman by both French colonials and the resistance movement. She takes an unconventional

approach to re-scripting the engendered views of Algerian women by examining the emotions of women in their domestic lives. Djébar's short story collection, *Women of Algiers in their Apartments*, focuses on women's rights to express negative emotions: her characters are repeatedly told to suppress their grief, loss, or disappointment. These emotions are seen as less important than the national suffering for liberation from French colonialism.

Djébar's lens turns to the inner life of the Muslim family. She narrows in on the different coping strategies used by female family members. Characters simultaneously embody and struggle against the FLN's familiar definitions of acceptable roles for women. As mentioned earlier, the FLN's stance on women's positions during the revolutionary struggle was clear: "It is an independent Algeria that Algerian women will achieve in human dignity the full and complete development of their rights" (Kopola 164). Immediately after freedom, however, women were expected to return to their secluded and restricted lives. Djébar raises questions regarding the importance of the individual *vis-à-vis* the nation: if women are not allowed the right to mourn, cry, or lament, what, if any, visibility do their concerns have for nation? These narratives contain a corpus of women, including the young and single female fighter, the wife of the male freedom fighter, the widow of the male freedom fighter, and the girl too young to be involved in the revolution. Each character experiences the war and independence in a different way. For example, the mother in these stories is the voice of tradition, keeping all her daughters in the pre-revolutionary social frame. Djébar's stories feature women who use emotional outbursts to reclaim their own voices.

In her narratives about the Partition of India in the late 1940s, Khadija Mastur exposes the detrimental effects of dependence on domestic hierarchies. Mastur's narratives illustrate the limited roles of protector or violator available to men when the predominant social order

disintegrates. Her male narrators demonstrate how gender roles restrict men as well as women in a patriarchal system where women's honor is based on the purity of their bodies. For Mastur, examining the terms of the sexual violation of women of all religious communities is a means of understanding the unprecedented violence amongst communities that had coexisted.

Mastur captures the enormity of these numbers in her fiction, thereby making the migration and upheaval particular. Her stories are told by male characters who witness the violence; this voice underscores an absence of women who were abducted, raped, and killed during the upheaval. She uses male characters to recover the particular stories of female victims who were killed before they could tell their stories. She also uses male characters to demonstrate how the violence and rhetoric of retaliation during this period rendered men just as powerless as women. These male characters were unable to resist the logic of the mob, resulting in the kidnapping, raping, and murder of women.

These texts overlap in multiple ways and extend certain approaches to particular themes. Chughtai and Djébar emphasize a lack of privacy or autonomous space in the homes of their characters. Djébar's fiction echoes Chughtai's concerns for restoring female experiences and voices to a historiography that had largely ignored or misrepresented them. Women's spaces in homes as setting in many of Chughtai's stories echoes Djébar's exploration into women's "apartments" as the movement inward simultaneously exposes external influences on daily life rendering the private public. In the climate of emerging anti-colonial pressures, Chughtai explores social concerns that impact women's lives in significant ways. Courting ceremonies, marriage, and domestic relationships are prominent in her examination of limiting influences on women's lives and the ways women conspire against and fail one another. Djébar's texts also explore marital conventions in the context of familial relationships across generations. However,

Djebar's texts are unique because they are colored by the contrast in British and French approaches to colonization, the violence of the Algerian resistance, and the dominance of Islam in Algerian nationalist rhetoric.

Mastur shared Chughtai's desire to expose how female sexuality and lack of autonomy harmed women, both Muslim and Hindu, in Indian society. The abject poverty and violence with which many of Mastur's protagonists deal is a shift from Chughtai's focus on upper-middle-class Muslim homes; it brings into literary focus an entire segment of women's experiences that had been largely ignored. Mastur's writings on the Partition of India bring to light the consequences of the separation movement that was coalescing during Chughtai's most prolific period. Mastur's stories illustrate the cost of the realization of the Muslim homeland on Indian women of all faiths.

Mastur and Djebar are interested in expressing traumatic memories associated with the nationalist movements of their countries. They do so by connecting their narratives to violent historical movements, where the historical context serves as the background for the stories. The more immediate questions of these narratives concern the consequences of these historic, turbulent events for women. The emotions of their characters demonstrate varied possibilities for mourning after violent events such as the Partition of India and the Algerian revolution. They inscribe gender, memory, and trauma onto fiction as a means of reclaiming marginal narratives that were previously treated as apocryphal to the national memories (Tharu 74).

The three writers used short stories to expose the gaps and fissures in the representations of women in their countries. They demonstrate the detrimental effects of gender constructions on men and women. All three writers use narrators who are able to recover introspection, memory, and mourning as devices for resisting communal interpretations of daily events (Kabir 190). This

reading of Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur will build a variegated understanding of how women contest the normative roles they are expected to play in familial and social hierarchies. The similarities in themes and forms do not amount to a similarity in execution or results, nor do the narratives point to a shared experience. Instead, the emphasis is on understanding the multiple ways in which women resist the imposition of directives on their personal choices.

When Real Life and Fiction Converge

Assia Djébar and Ismat Chughtai share similar biographical backgrounds. Both were raised in upper middle class homes and allowed post secondary education by liberal fathers. Djébar and Chughtai were sanctioned by their communities for expressing unacceptable sentiments of social violation and misbehavior in their writing. These two authors share the dubious distinction of being publicly decried for the ideas and narrative expression in their fiction. Djébar's first novel, *La Soif* (1957), was criticized because of its focus on a young heroine's personal discovery. This focus on burgeoning female sexuality was heavily condemned because it came during the first few years of the Algerian Revolution and was considered inappropriately distracting from the anti-colonial movement. Chughtai's censure came for her allusions to female homosexuality in her short story "The Quilt" (1942).

The two writers share more than just the censure of their contemporaries – they share creative interest in empowering women's voices through fiction. It is no accident that their texts feature women who misbehave against an array of social prohibitions for women's behavior. Because of the definition of women's roles within Muslim societies, much of Djébar and Chughtai's fiction focuses on women's experiences within the home and their struggles against the imposition of familial expectations. The dramatic focus on middle class women and their homes, where nothing really happens other than daily struggles within the family, is an unconventional choice for both writers. Through such narratives, Chughtai and Djébar

demonstrate their concern and commitment to empowering other women to gain a place in public discourse. Both Chughtai and Djebbar recover the lived experiences of women which stand in stark contrast to the popular nationalist imagery of gender roles. Their stories investigate the middle class family, with plots of home as a place where identity politics are complex and women must choose amongst an array of competing allegiances. They explore how women fashion meaning and significance despite often intricate relational hierarchies in which relatives police one another's behavior within the home.

The inclusion of Khadija Mastur in this study highlights another important theme of this study: the way fiction allows writers to configure historical events as a backdrop for personal exploration. Mastur's personal experience is an example of the political bifurcation that occurred during the Partition of India. Although she was born in India and lived the first half of her life in there, Mastur is classified as a Pakistani writer. Mastur's personal encounter with the ravages of Independence occurred when she relocated to Lahore with her family after Partition. Lahore, a city in the newly created nation of Pakistan, was very close to the Indian border. Lahore was a principal site of violence and turmoil during Partition. Mastur examines the fate of single and widowed women who were forced to subsist in a society that favored and empowered men.

Mastur shows that the promise of independence from British rule did not alleviate female burdens, but rather increased them. During the chaotic migration women often lost their male protectors, either through death or physical separation and after Partition were left economically vulnerable. Mastur's fiction captures the dilemma of women who were trapped, despite the political independence gained for men within the same society. She shows how patriarchy's configuration of familial honor, focused on the purity of the female body, negates the power of

the home as a place of protection for women. When home disintegrates during moments of social upheaval, particularly in this case during the riots that accompanied the Partition of India, women and men became powerless to stop the abuse of women. She pierces the collective trauma of this violent period. She thus makes real the experience of the individual by separating single narratives from the stories of thousands of rapes, abductions, and killings. The male characters in her stories become as static and narrowly defined as females.

Mastur's stories reveal that patriarchy poses only two roles for men: either the protector of women's honor or its violator. Her narratives set during the Partition of India illustrate the damage to women and men when the protective barriers of Muslim domesticity are removed. She shows the disintegration of the family and the debilitating consequences on the everyday life of citizens, both male and female. Her interest in the intersection of history and fiction allows for comparisons between her writing and that of Assia Djebar's stories about the effects of the Algerian Revolution.

Djebar and Mastur illustrate the personal pathos of major historical moments, the Algerian Revolution and the Partition of India, which, in both instances, were accompanied by violence on an unpredicted and unprecedented scale. Their writing investigates the interior lives of individuals, and the impact of such violence on society, the family, and women. Mastur's texts focus on the extent to which violence against women also limits men. Her stories amplify the ways in which men also are disaffected by patriarchy.

All three writers contributed to the literary traditions of their relevant language groups. Chughtai and Mastur contributed to Urdu literature and Djebar to Francophone literature. Chughtai and Mastur were members of the Progressive Writers' Movement, a group of intellectuals committed to social reform through the arts. They wrote in Urdu, the language of

choice for public discourse among Muslim intellectuals in North India. It is significant that Urdu literature was thought at the time to be a “vehicle for human aspirations” (Minault, “Secluded Scholars” 12). Chughtai’s boldness came from her privileged background and her early exposure to liberal ideas. Chughtai harnessed her desire for social activism by writing about the disadvantages inherent in being a woman in Indian society. Her narratives provided stinging commentary on the customs and practices accepted by wealthy women in a patriarchy that drove women to abuse other women. Khadija Mastur gave voice to the illiterate and poor women of India and Pakistan through her writings. Mastur, lacking extensive formal education herself, brought into print the plight facing poor women in both countries. Her portrayals of the fractured lives of women, without father or husbands, examined the cultural notions of women’s roles and their acceptable interactions in the public sphere. Both Ismat Chughtai and Khadija Mastur used literature as a mirror for the untold stories of the millions of women in their society. They explored women’s struggles for economic, moral, and physical autonomy from the dictates of familial and social conventions.

For Djébar, the choice of French was more problematic. Born in Algeria, and a speaker of Arabic, Djébar nonetheless choose to write in French because of her extensive colonial education. French, instead of Arabic, places some distance between Djébar and her Algerian readers. Traces of oral Arabic decenter and disrupt Djébar’s use of French. She mingles the language of her foreign colonial education with the Arabic spoken in her everyday life. The presence of Arabic in the midst of French narratives deterritorializes the conventional French and creates new possibilities for expression. The use of the two languages, both French, that of the colonizer, and Arabic, that of the colonized, allows for new gaps where a more complex identity emerges (Minault, “Ismat” 28). Djébar’s choice allows her a “fluid, dynamic language [to]

occupy the space between loss and a new beginning” (Cooke 35). The fusion of French and Arabic creates a multilingual text that uncovers the mental, physical, real, and fantastic experiences of women who have long been kept out of the public sphere. (Best 878). The product is prose that negotiates the complexities of both Djébar’s identities: first as a French speaker, and second as a Magherbi woman.

CHAPTER 2
ALTERNATIVE DOMESTICITY IN THE SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM ZENNA: “I AM A
REALIST”

“No one bothered about the things I had written before or after “Lihaaf.”¹ I was put down as a purveyor of sex. It is only in the last couple of years that the younger generation has recognized that I am a realist and not an obscene writer.”²

Ismat Chughtai

Ismat Chughtai’s (1915-1991) novels and short stories portray the home as a site of myriad forms of oppression for women and of violations of contemporary Muslim ideals of the family in North India. In so doing Chughtai challenged the central tenet of Muslim nationalism, the idea of the family as the means of preserving Muslim culture and virtue. A socio-political critique of reform attitudes, Chughtai’s work responds to the ways in which the behavior of the Muslim housewife was used to refute Hindu and British colonial encroachment on Indo-Muslim culture. In order to maintain a minority identity among Hindu and colonial interests, women’s *adab* or their ability to maintain purity and honor in the face of corrupting influences became a means for the Muslim community to differentiate itself. Defining women as “the guardian of national culture, indigenous religion, and family traditions” became important to Muslim reformers who were concerned with the preservation of Islamic society (Jayawardena 14). The well-educated, well-behaved housewife was promulgated in didactic literature, novels, and handbooks intended for the instruction of women so they might better fulfill their familial duties and uphold their communal role as cultural preserver and boundary marker. Chughtai’s fiction revises conventions of *adab* literature wherein well-behaved women were promised rewards for

¹ Urdu word for quilt and also the Urdu title for Chughtai’s story, “The Quilt.”

² Chughtai, Ismat. *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan*. Trans. M. Asaduddin. “Autobiographical Fragments.” *Manushi*. no. 110 (1999): 35.

fulfilling their duties without complaining. She directly challenges the both Muslim and Hindu rationalizations for containing women within patriarchal marriage.

In addition to challenging Hindu and colonial visions of the Muslim family, Chughtai addresses the advice for young brides presented in the works of the influential writer Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1864-1943). The chief subject of her oeuvre, women within their homes, appears on the surface level as domestic melodrama. However, her focus on the intricate wrangling amongst family members is deliberate; she enumerates the detrimental effects of Thanawi's ideal woman on family life. Additionally, she highlights the various ways women transgress this ideal from within the *zenana*. Chughtai's cognizance of Thanawi's project, and her purposeful response to Thanawi's ideals, is evident from both her fiction and her testimony during her morality trial.

In this chapter, I demonstrate Chughtai's challenge to the nationalist ideal of womanhood by juxtaposing Thanawi's prescriptions for women's proper behavior against depictions of women's oppression and transgressions in two of her most influential short stories, "The Rock," and "The Quilt." In both of these stories young brides are welcomed into their marital homes. However, the brides suffer disastrous results in regards to their autonomy, self-esteem, and sexuality. The transformation of the young bride at the whims of her much older husband is at the center of Chughtai's dismantling of wifely prescriptions. In her stories she exposes misbehaving husbands who are outside Thanawi's vision for domestic stability. This male misbehavior is largely absent from Thanawi's writings, thereby underlining the free reign of masculine prerogative that functions as a corrosive force within the home. Much of the critical reception of Chughtai's work was focused almost exclusively on her story "The Quilt." By reading this well examined narrative against another work from her collection, I will demonstrate

the breadth of her critique on women's subjectivity and the national ideology of women's roles in the 1930s-1940s North Indian Muslim community

Chughtai's resistance to traditionalist views of women was indicative of a much broader socio-political stance. She was the most well known female writer of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). The PWA, active from the 1930s through the 1950s, was a group of influential, secular Muslims. Formed after a storm of protests following the publication of a short story anthology, *Angare*, or *Burning Coals* (1932), the PWA was an Urdu literary movement focused on addressing social inequality. Under the early leadership of Munshi Premchand (1880-1936), the movement was identified as an artistic shift away from the mystical or religious elements of the previous popular fiction of the sub-continent. Premchand's established reputation as a writer provided a strong footing for many new writers who were eager to develop their own craft. The members of the PWA agreed that literature could serve political purposes:

Along with the awareness of a new mode of writing—realism, especially connected with social criticism—the Urdu writer found himself in the midst of a political storm in his society, a storm whipped up by a set of freshly-introduced political ideas. Anti-imperialism, national independence, social revolution ... These crisscrossing patterns of political and social dynamism, and the national revolutionary struggle going on in India itself, awakened the Urdu writer, as they did the writers of other Indian languages, to the new realities of life that ran counter to the traditional views of their forefathers as much as to the preferences of their colonial masters and the latter's followers. (Zeno 39-42)

The PWA writers used fiction as a showcase for limitations of the traditions, social conventions, and class distinctions of the poor and underprivileged. The more radical members of the PWA included Sadat Hassan Manto, Rajinder Bedi, and Krishen Chander. Chughtai's fiction differs from Manto's in important ways. Her stories broaden the scope of the PWA beyond depictions of nationalist ideologies produced by male writers such as Manto, Bedi, and Chander. Instead of focusing on "colonial masters," Chughtai's writing challenges "traditional views of forefathers" in her stories which focus on life within upper-class Muslim households. She presents the

gendered nature of the home by showing contradictions in state and communal imaginings of the Muslim household. Her exploration of private life within the home was a thematic contribution to the PWA.

The PWA's controversial collection of stories depicted religious hypocrisy and injustice. For example, the narrative *Angare*, written by Rashid Jahan (the PWA's only female collaborator), illuminated the limited lives of women under *purdah*. Jahan's sparse story, about two pages in length, exposes the contrast between women and men in Muslim society. Moreover, it highlights the neglect of women as adult members of the community. Jahan's story revealed the static life of women. These women were not only confined within their homes, but also outside the home where they were forced to wear veils and had limited mobility. Dependent upon her husband, the rich inner life of the female protagonist, filled with personal desires and ambitions, contradicts the facts of her stationary, immobile exterior. An outcry against this narrative for criticizing Muslim society culminated in a ban on its further publication. This conflict identified the PWA and its members as a counterculture within North Indian Muslim society in the 1930s through the 1950s. *Angare's* publication and subsequent banning established two significant precedents: 1) the use of British law to censor Urdu writers, and 2) women writers critiquing traditionalist attitudes towards gender.

Chughtai's development as a writer occurred against this backdrop of burgeoning nationalism and activist literature; she lived during a period when Muslim intellectuals were defining gender and modernity in order to prescribe women's roles in society. Chughtai continues Jahan's critique of women's experiences by enlarging the discussion of issues related to domesticity beyond *purdah* and mobility.

Chughtai was particularly interested in exposing the gap between prescriptions for ideal feminine behavior and the daily realities experienced by women of various households. Where the nationalist project restricted examination of the home declared it a site of original cultural production, Chughtai opened the home for scrutiny and examination. The 20th century Muslim elite of Northern India focused on cultivating shared social norms for a population living between British and Hindu cultures. In India in the late 19th century, women's roles became increasingly important to the anti-colonial movement as a means of articulating resistance to colonial cultural encroachment. For North Indian reformers, the Muslim home represented the cultural epicenter for a sub-community living simultaneously under colonialism and a Hindu majority. Chughtai's work challenges the idea of home as a continuous and homogenously neutral space where culture is unquestioningly preserved and protected from colonial forces. In her stories, the threats to traditional values originate from within the home itself and from within its desiring subjects.

Chughtai's distinctive choice of setting, the upper middle class Muslim home, contrasted the PWA's emphasis on the lower class. She wrote about the convergence of patriarchy and nationalism within the home, where class was also inscribed by gender. This convergence and home space confined women, including mistresses and maid servants, within a domestic hierarchy. In her narratives, she exposes latent threats to women's autonomy in marriage; the wives in her stories are confined by male authority and scramble for any measure of agency, no matter how small, within the hierarchy of the household.

"The Rock" and "The Quilt" are stories told by young female narrators. These narrators are co-residents of marital households and they recollect and record abuses. In their acts of remembering, the narrators implicate themselves as active participants in oppressive household

dynamics. I call these narratives “anti-nostalgic” because the narrators do not recover scenes of idyllic perfection; they do not long for past days of domestic stability. Rather, they recollect scenes of neglect, abuse, and disregard, whereby they watch women wrestle for well-being.

These two stories are told as extended flashbacks, where the narrators re-enter scenes from childhood. These recollections reveal a household where women are mistreated by other residents; they show the home as a fractured and contested space that is unwelcoming to its married female members. In the retelling of these narratives, the narrator relies on her childhood persona to recount the domestication of young housewives. This literary strategy produces a distance between the adult narrator and her childhood abuse. This distance opens another issue: it demonstrates the lifelong results of abuse by exposing the adult narrator’s attempts to absolve herself of guilt. Additionally, the choice of an adult narrator opening and closing the narrative exposes the narrator’s position within a corrupt system. Chughtai uses memory to “unwrap” the home as a site of wholeness by showing the uneven behaviors of all household members, male as well as female.

The use of figurative language in both “The Rock” and “The Quilt” relies heavily on animal imagery. Cats, snakes, cows, elephants, and frogs are some of the referents which Chughtai uses as simile to highlight the dehumanization of women within their homes. The use of local domestic creatures, such as chickens and fish, exposes the narrator’s consumption of sexist attitudes towards women; the commentary is rooted within the dominant system of misuse. The lasting effect is very different between these two stories. Both stories demonstrate Chughtai’s dexterity as a writer and her commitment to capturing a spectrum of possibilities for women. This spectrum of possibilities that Chughtai addresses is dependant upon the particular details of their woman’s domestic environment.

Chughtai's emphasis continuously returns to the *zenana*, or the female space of the home. In this space, women grapple with their desires, ambitions, and duties. As Geeta Patel argues, the *zenana* and its residents are historicized in Chughtai's fiction. In this fiction, women resist both colonial and nationalist assumptions of life within. They actively seek other possibilities within the boundaries established by national and ideological traditions. Women are not the languid, sexualized subjects of male observers or the well-behaved domestic ideal of an ideology. They struggle to create in-between spaces of their own. They try to establish a modicum of agency, with varying degrees of success.

Socially, the *zenana* was the locus of control for women's behaviors; women were kept inside the home as a way to counteract outer threats to female purity. Thanawi discouraged women from traveling outside their homes for almost any reason, including attending a mosque or family gatherings. Women's primary functions were best carried out inside the home. Thanawi declared that even a woman's religious duties were better suited for home life.

In Chughtai's stories, however, the instability of women's choices comes from within the home and amidst the interlay of familial relationships. Patel reads the *zenana* in Chughtai's fiction as a space where gender, subalternity, and sexuality are contested by women, apart from either the colonial or national gaze. Chughtai complicates the idea that domestic instability arises externally; she uncovers conflicting identities originating from within the home. Chughtai is interested in both the literal spaces women physically occupy and the figurative spaces they fulfill in familial hierarchies. Her female characters come from disparate household environments. In some cases, their struggles lead to successes, while in others, the results are disastrous failures. In explorations of imperfect domesticity, Chughtai resists exhortations for proper Muslim womanhood.

Ashraf Ali Thanawi's *Bhishti Zewar, Jewelry of Paradise* (1905) is an example of an influential prescriptive text aimed at helping women create a seamless domestic harmony. Urdu critic and translator Barbara Metcalf explains that Thanawi's work was part of an effort to bring "mainstream Islamic teachings to women" (qtd. in Metcalf, "Perfecting Women" 1). Thanawi's concern that women must know how to conduct themselves was imbedded in a strong belief that if women properly followed instruction, the result would be an orderly, unique society, mindful of its social and religious duties. The preservation and maintain of a separate identity from mainstram Hinduism or colonial British influence was a key goal for the Muslim community. The result was a meticulous cataloguing of mundane details intended as a curriculum for the future Muslim housewife. Thanawi's work became part of popular reading; as Metcalf notes, the text "rapidly became a classic gift for Muslim brides" (qtd. in Metcalf, "Perfecting Women" 3). Thanawi's status as a Muslim scholar and reformist kept this text in circulation as a valid reference in discourse surrounding women and the home. The ten books that make up Thanawi's volume cover household duties, religious responsibilities, and social obligations for women. The domestic advice found in his writing ignores the complexity of familial hierarchies which impinged upon women's daily lives.

In person, as well as in her writing, Chughtai challenged registers of perception and the labels that codify women's behavior. In 1944, she was charged with writing obscene literature for the story "The Quilt." The trial took place in a Lahore court.³ The central issues were Chughtai's representations of sexuality. The charges against Chughtai evinced the Muslim community's anxiety over her alternative depictions of *zenana* life:

³ Lahore is in present day Pakistan according to the borders drawn by the Partition of India in August 1947.

[she was] accused of disturbing the conventions through which religion was folded into domesticity and through which propriety and civility were represented.... Muslim communities, incensed at the contraventions of honor and the breach of the limits that demarcated the civil and the uncivil, asked a colonial court to intervene to establish the proper, civil, civilized regularities. (Patel, "Marking the Quilt" 137)

Chughtai resisted the charges brought against her for being a writer of obscene literature and was eventually found not guilty. In her autobiography, Chughtai argues that defining what is obscene is subjective. She recollects the questions of the prosecuting attorney. His line of questioning focused on her moral sensibilities in an effort to prove that she did not respect socio-religious mores:

"Wasn't religious education imparted to you?"

"Aslam Saheb, I've read *Behishti Zavar*. Such revealing things are written there..." I said innocently. Aslam Saheb looked upset. I continued, "When I had read it in childhood I was shocked. Those things seemed vulgar to me. But when I read it again after my B.A. I realized that they were not vulgar but crucial things of life about which every sensible person should be aware. Well, people can brand the books prescribed in the courses of psychology and medicine vulgar if they so want." (qtd. in Chughtai, "Autobiographical Fragments" 34-35).

She resisted the court's manipulation of the label "obscene" applied to her work by calling into question one of the most traditional texts of the Muslim sub-community. To a child, the intricacies of adult life as outlined by Thanawi would be confusing, if not repellent. Her mention of Thanawi's text in relation to "religious education" is a purposeful recollection of what was largely considered a standard social text. In raising objections to medicine and psychology, Chughtai relies on context to define the registers of civil and obscene. She refused "obscene" as a category for her writing and placed herself within the Muslim socio-religious tradition of north India by referencing the *Behishti Zavar*. She asserts that she is part of mainstream tradition as a means of refuting the label of obscenity. She continuously questioned the definitions of proper behavior for women and men and standardized catalogues of interpretation for literary expression.

Chughtai was cleared of the charges because the law defined “obscene” as the use of four letter words. Neither in the narrator’s look beneath the quilt nor in the rest of the story were there any four letter words. Her lawyer successfully argued that the acts of the women under the quilt were not named in the text and would be unfamiliar to readers who lacked prior knowledge of homoeroticism. Chughtai depicted the relationship between the women without naming it according to legal definition. The charges were dropped, but the story retained its power as a “resignification of a structure/zenana and the women within it without a change in the normalizing signifiers” (Patel, “Marking the Quilt” 186). Chughtai recaptures the milieu of the upper middle class home as an ambiguous space where power is constantly negotiated amongst its members.

A Sister-in-Law and Her Husband’s Family: “. . . the Complete Housewife”

In the Chughtai’s story, “The Rock,” the narrator, a younger sister, examines her brother’s multiple marriages by closely observing the body and behavior of each wife. Based both on her childhood recollections and her adult experiences, she reflects on the politics of the misogynist behavior of her brother, Bhaiya. Her first sister-in-law is a girl close to her own age. This young girl is quickly transformed into a docile, overweight housewife and mother of four, vastly different from the spirited girl who married a man nine years her senior. When a female neighbor shows interest in Bhaiya, he divorces his first wife to marry the neighbor. Years later, the narrator is reunited with the couple and surprised at the shabby state of her once elegant sister-in-law. A pattern emerges in which younger, attractive, modern women become the wives of this handsome man, but are eventually discarded for someone else. The narrator’s categorical refusal to blame her brother for the drastic changes in each wife’s appearance demonstrates her own acceptance of his degradation and callous rejection of the women he has transformed. In her

allegiance to her brother, shown by the use of unfavorable animal metaphors to describe the wife's body, the narrator reveals her own degradation of the housewives in her family.

The narrator actively reinforces the strategies of the adults of the home to mold her sister-in-law into a housewife and mother: "In four or five years, with everyone's help, she turned into a complete housewife" (Chughtai, "The Quilt" 47). No one in the house is exempt from this project of domestication: "Amma fed her chicken soup and sweets and Bhaiya furnished tonics; with each child Bhabi gained ten or fifteen pounds" (47). The bride is caught between her mother-in-law and her husband who both have designs on her body and personality. The narrator assists in erasing the new bride's specificity by referring to her only as "Bhabi," which means sister-in-law. It is not until much later in the text that the narrator finally uses her sister-in-law's name, Shehnaz.

Shehnaz's forced domesticity is also supported by her parents: "Bhabi came from a liberal family and had been schooled at a convent. The previous year her sister had eloped with a Christian, so her parents, worried that she might do something similar, took her out of school and quickly married her off" (47). The actions of Shehnaz's sister are a double violation: she not only chose her own husband despite her family's wishes, but also married a non-Muslim. Her sister's transgressive behavior taints Shehnaz in a community defined by familial honor. Her parents use marriage as a means of relocating their daughter into proper social standing via her role as a wife and mother.

Shehnaz's husband, Bhaiya, employs traditional methods to erase any traces of her independence: "Bhaiya was anxious to set her up as a housewife without delay because he was afraid that even though she was married, she might still follow in her sister's footsteps. As a result, he earnestly embarked on the task of molding her into a homemaker" (48). Her obesity

results from her husband's attempts to erase her personality and replace it with loyalty to him.

The narrator reports this deliberate and invasive undertaking in detail:

Gradually she stopped using make-up. Bhaiya hated lipstick, and the sight of mascara or kohl on a woman's eyes infuriated him. ... She had short hair when she got married. But now it was plastered down and tied at the back so that no one could tell that the bride was a short-haired *mem*. Her hair had grown since then but had become thin because of frequent pregnancies. Her husband found her pleasing just the way she was, untidy and disheveled. (48)

The lack of beauty enhancements such as make-up, lipstick, mascara, or even kohl, which was used widely by South Asian women, separates the choices Shehnaz made as a girl in her parents' home from what is dictated to her in her husband's home. She is "untidy and disheveled;" she was encouraged to "let herself go" and "her body slackened like dough left out overnight" (48). Her husband's preferences are explicit and purposeful to the point of dictating what his wife wears: he "hated jeans and skirts! He was also repelled by the sight of tight shirts hugging the body." Shehnaz conforms to his requirements for behavior and appearances: she "generally went around the house dressed in a sari blouse and petticoat with a dressing-gown thrown over them. ... if someone special came to the house unexpectedly, she chose to stay in her room with the children." Shehnaz's position in relation to the other members of her household is startlingly clear. She is not allowed to even dress as though she were participating in a world outside her home and thus seeks refuge with her children when there are adult visitors. The contrast between Shehnaz and her husband are remarkable and meticulously described by the narrator:

Her husband was nine years her senior, but compared to her, Bhaiya looked really young. Still quite slim, with a well-kept figure, he exercised daily, carefully monitored his diet He was still boyish in appearance. Although he was thirty-one, he didn't look a day older than twenty-five. (48)

Shehnaz's husband's manipulation of her body is as deliberate as his control over his own. He is "well kept" with a "carefully monitored" diet which heightens the contrast between his body and that of his wife.

Shehnaz's transformation from a playful young girl into an unkempt wife is approved by all: "...her parents and in-laws also praised her simplicity" (48). This simplicity is also defended by the narrator who insists that Shehnaz's appearance is appropriate for her role in the household: "She was a housewife, a daughter-in-law, and she was everyone's darling; why should she dress up and preen herself like a prostitute to please people?" The narrator does not define her sister-in-law in any terms other than those related to her domestic roles. This subordinate position of the sister-in-law places the narrator in opposition to her, challenging any possibility of unity.

Concurrent with Shehnaz's physical transformation is the domesticating of her spirit. Initially, Shehnaz is playful and active around the household, not sequestered within the female quarters. She is described as a robust young woman: "Having been raised in a modern household, she was as playful as a doe" (48). Shehnaz's emotional expressiveness includes a strong temper that is tested during disagreements. The narrator watches Shehnaz's disagreements take on physical dimensions: "... often she would attack Bhaiya⁴ like a ferocious cat when she was angry with him, and scratch his face and rip his shirt-front with her teeth" (53). The cat-like image of the young wife highlights the cunning and power her sister-in-law admires in her.

Shehnaz's physicality is easily overwhelmed by her husband and her attempts to resist proper behavior for women are foiled. The narrator uses a cat metaphor to describe her sister-in-law: "...when Bhabi⁵ was as delicate as a butterfly and when she quarreled with Bhaiya she reminded one of a little Persian cat" (53). The contrasting images of a butterfly and a Persian cat emphasize the difference between Shehnaz's beautiful, delicate exterior and her inner determined

⁴ Respectful title for older brother.

⁵ Respectful title for sister, also used for sister-in-law.

spirit. The narrator's use of beautiful objects underlies her attempts to overlook the inner turmoil of the young wife. She senses the vibrant personality behind her sister-in-law's feminine exterior, but frames it in the limited terms of valued and cherished possessions. In this sense, the Persian cat as a rare and coveted pet is a subtle reference to the husband's position as the owner and master of a rare domestic creature. As owner and master, the husband trains his wife and defines what behavior is acceptable. Through the physical struggle, which, as the narrator notes, occurs often early in the marriage, the wife expresses her youth, energy, and power. However, she is soon overpowered by her husband, both physically and through his superior position as the head of the household. He responds to her attacks with enough pressure to pacify her: "Bhaiya would crush her in his arms. Reduced to helplessness, she would place her head on his chest and sob like a frightened, thirsty little bird" (54). In her husband's arms, Shehnaz loses her vitality and is no longer the aggressor. She is overwhelmed, encircled, and trapped, both literally and metaphorically. As a daughter-in-law, she has very limited recourses. The image of the subdued Shehnaz as "a frightened, thirsty little bird" foreshadows her transformation into a powerless member of the household who is omitted from social activities and decision-making.

The narrator adopts her brother's standards. Her compliments of Shehnaz depend upon her sister-in-law's ability to play the assigned domestic roles: Shehnaz is "everyone's darling," provided that she does not "dress up and preen herself" which are actions considered those of a "prostitute to please people." Shehnaz does not have to worry about beauty because she is far more valuable to the family as a domestic. She is the one who performs most household chores, despite the presence of a large number of servants and other female family members:

Bhabi had gone to the kitchen to fry *papads*. The cook had over-fried them and Bhaiya liked them lightly browned. Ah, what was Bhabi but an angel! I could never be persuaded to go to the kitchen after I returned from college, and my evening clothes were especially

unsuited for cooking. In addition, I didn't even know how to fry *papads*.⁶ My sisters were also in the same boat as I. (48)

The contrast between Shehnaz and the narrator and her sisters exemplifies the double standard within this household. Shehnaz learns her lessons well and becomes devoted to her husband. Even in the presence of a family cook, she dutifully enters the kitchen to create her husband's preferred dishes. The narrator and her sisters, however, are single women, indulged by their brother/Shehnaz's husband, Bhaiya. The modernity of these single women is exercised outside the terms of domesticity. For example, education becomes a marker that distinguishes the narrator from her sister-in-law; after college, the narrator never returned to the kitchen. The narrator's dress also marks her as different from her sister-in-law. She does not wear dowdy house clothes but "evening clothes especially unsuited for cooking." She and her sisters are exempt from domestic duties: "Farida was entertaining her fiancé who had come for a visit; Razia and Shammem were busy chatting with their friends and certainly they couldn't be expected to fry *papads*. Anyway, we are all little birds in our parents' home, testing our wings for flight" (48).

The sisters separate their identities from Shehnaz's domestic identity. The narrator's dismissive tone when she acknowledges her lack of domestic education shows her unwillingness to even attempt to learn Bhabi's many duties. She has an utter disregard for the role assigned to her sister-in-law. She proudly declares, "In addition, I didn't even know how to fry *papads*." Her sisters, "also in the same boat," grow to expect Bhabi's domestic contributions while they ignore the fact that this domestic help results from Bhabi's extensive labor. Alongside their brother, they utilize Bhabi to the extent that she differs very little from any other household servant. The contrast between the brother, his family, and their consumption of modern dress and attitudes is a

⁶ Fried lentil.

stark contrast to the conservative expectations used to discipline their sister-in-law into an obedient domestic.

The narrator's descriptions of Shehnaz transform from complimentary images into increasingly critical comparisons. This change demonstrates a growing complicity in her relation to the abuse of her sister-in-law. The narrator's charming comparisons of Shehnaz to beautiful animals are replaced with ordinary symbols of the domestic. The narrator admits her sister-in-law still has traces of her former beauty. For example, she says Shehnaz still has "fine features, a butter-white complexion and small, dainty hands and feet." These rare compliments, however, are negated by statements of the rest of Shehnaz's appearance. The life and energy of the young wife are replaced by the enormous body of a wife and mother who becomes an inanimate object, or "dough left out overnight" (52).

Shehnaz eventually is almost completely characterized by her enormous body. Family antics she once used to love become tinged with humiliation. Her husband tries to tease her in their familiar and physical way, but her response is no longer similar to that of a Persian cat: "He would lovingly grind his teeth and squeeze Bhabi in front of us, or sometimes he would try to pick her up in his arms, but she slipped from his hands like a large fish, leaving him feeling a little foolish" (52). The large fish comparison allows Shehnaz to escape her husband's grasp but not without signifying her bloated body. Her changed body earns her more unflattering characterizations: "And rueful, like a cornered cow, Bhabi would immediately leave the room to start planning the pudding or some other delectable dessert." The use of the image of a cow shows the narrator's growing awareness of her sister-in-law's position as someone easily intimidated into submissiveness. The narrator changes her characterization of Shehnaz's intelligence from cunning to docility. This change in characterization from playful doe and

clawing Persian cat to fish and cow indicate the narrator's awareness of a subdued sister-in-law. The images of a subdued and enormous woman replace previous images of an active and assertive woman. This transition to submission and meekness is tied directly to the sister-in-law's duties in the kitchen and her consumption of food. The puddings and desserts, which everyone used to fatten her up, are now her only comfort. She is trapped within a maternal grotesque and unhealthy body. As an obedient wife and dutiful mother, Shehnaz has lost any identity outside of the family. She has even lost the recognition of her own body.

Implicit in the conditioning of her sister-in-law, the narrator overlooks her brother's role in creating an obese, unkempt wife. Instead she joins her sisters in teasing Shehnaz. They push Shehnaz into the water, which only ensures her body is fully exposed: "... she slid from our hands like a heavy bundle. Her wet clothes clung to her body and revealed her unshapely figure, a frightening sight; it seemed as though someone had wrapped a comforter around her waist. She did not look that horrible when dressed in normal clothes" (52). The narrator looks at the body of this mother of four, a woman close to her own age, and reacts with disgust. The narrator has no regard for the mitigating factors that differentiate her from her sister-in-law. She is momentarily stunned and turns away from the "frightening sight," unable to acknowledge the contradiction between Shehnaz's body and those of everyone else playing in the water. Shehnaz gets out of the water with "a sour face." She walks away "like a wet chicken," leaving the family to their play rather than joining them as she once would have done. (53).

Through these stinging comparisons, the narrator reveals the non-sexual space Shehnaz now occupies in her mind. The chicken simile marks the narrator's understanding of the maternal body as a unit of domestic production. It positions Shehnaz exclusively within the home, unlike the butterfly which might have been capable of escape. As a domestic animal, the chicken

produces consumable or reproductive commodities; its body is used by others for multiple purposes. The parallel between Shehnaz's changed body and a wet chicken reveals the narrator's gendered reading of her sister-in-law's identity within the household. It is also a foreshadowing of Shehnaz's erasure from the life of the family; she will be discarded once her productivity is no longer needed by her husband. In this final simile, the narrator understands her sister-in-law's contribution to the family is nothing more than that of a consumable animal.

Chughtai thus contests the causal link between proper behavior and certain rewards promised to housewives. She presents characters such as Shehnaz, who show willingness to embody cultural injunctions and are yet punished rather than rewarded. After years of dedication and proper behavior, Shehnaz does not receive the reward of a stable home. She does not receive the reward of having the respect of daughters-in-law or the type of respect she gives her sisters-in-laws while living in their home. Instead, she is used and then divorced and abandoned.

Ashraf Ali Thanawi's *Bihishti Zewar, Jewelry of Paradise* (1905) aimed to guide women in making daily choices. However, it would have been useless to Shehnaz in her predicament. The text outlined a curriculum for the education of the future Muslim housewife predicated on her devotion to her household duties. Book Six's subtitle, "A Discussion of Custom by Category," alerts readers to the daily practices which derail their ability to behave modestly.

Thanawi describes, in detail, the very few reasons for which women may leave the house:

The point is that it is wrong of women to leave their homes and go about here and there. At most, it is permissible for them to visit their parents or their close relatives, and then only once or twice a year. Beyond that, to go out imprudently, as is the custom, is simply illegitimate, whether it is to the home of relatives or someone else and whether the occasion be a wedding or a condolence, visiting the sick, offering congratulations, or joining the wedding procession from the bridegroom's house. (108)

These warnings against "illegitimate" behavior seek to remind women that their energy is best spent at home. Thanawi's advice is not helpful in Shehnaz's case: she has followed his dictates

to the point of only appearing before “informal guest[s]” within her home and then “wearing a rumpled, mousy-colored sari” (Chughtai, “The Quilt” 53). Thanawi’s logic is twisted by Shehnaz’s husband to become a means of controlling her, reducing her world to the immediate environment of her home and family.

Shehnaz tries to assert her former identity and her rights to emotion when her husband proposes a divorce: “With a loud scream Bhabi lunged toward Bhaiya. But she didn’t have the courage to scratch him. Terrified, she stood transfixed. Then she relinquished the last shred of her womanly dignity. She fell at his feet. She begged” (Chughtai, “The Quilt” 55). This emotional scene traces the denouement of Shehnaz’s influence over her Bhaiya. Shehnaz’s transition from a young Persian cat, clawing if angered, into a begging form at her husband’s feet demonstrates her painful journey from a desiring subject to controlled object.

The narrator is critical of Shehnaz’s anguish at Bhaiya and absolves him of responsibility. Instead, she critiques her sister-in-law for having “relinquished the last shred of her womanly dignity” by begging him to stay with her. Her brother, Shehnaz’s husband, refuses to keep this wife whose mannerisms he now detests. He is in complete control of the situation, ignoring his own extramarital misconduct. Both Bhaiya and the narrator use the divorce to criticize Shehnaz’s behavior. After spending years creating his version of the ideal domesticated housewife, he divorces Shehnaz to marry another petite, attractive, young woman who is again several years his junior. His hypocrisy in marrying someone who, aside from wearing make-up and having short hair, breaks many of other rules he forced on Shehnaz. Shehnaz’s fate is Chughtai’s caustic warning to all women who accept their husbands’ preferences without any regard for their own well-being.

Thanawi's injunctions for women are ignored by another character in Chughtai's narrative, a young woman Shabnam. Shabnam eventually causes Shehnaz's divorce by seducing and then marrying her husband. Her presence as a female who transgresses domestic boundaries casts her as a woman whose sexuality is public and mobile: "Standing on the other side of the hedge was a slight, fair-complexioned girl dressed in white drain-pipes and a lemon-colored blouse; she was running her slender fingers through short hair cut Marilyn Monroe style, and laughingly sheepishly" (49). At this moment, the narrator faces an antithesis of her brother's idea of a housewife. The comparison between Shabnam and Marilyn Monroe reveals the narrator's own position as a young girl coming of age in a traditional household permeated by modern and foreign influences. When Shabnam crosses the hedge barrier between the two properties, almost immediately the narrator becomes aware of heightened sexual energy: "In one graceful leap Shabnam swung over the hedge to our side." Shabnam is a woman free from the constraints of the house and refuses to be entertained in the women's quarters in the traditional manner. Shabnam's casual attitude towards this unplanned visit to her neighbor's home violates Thanawi's injunction against women traveling outside their homes. Their movement often does not keep modesty in dress or deportment in mind:

Many ladies are so careless that they let their hem hang out of the palanquin, or leave the curtain open on one side, or reek so much of perfume that its sweet smell hangs about them on the road. That is to display beauty before strangers. The noble *hadis* says that any woman who goes out of her house wearing perfume in such a way that its odor reaches others is very bad. This is the thirteenth sin. (qtd. in Metcalf, "Perfecting Women" 110)

Rather than acknowledging the danger in duplicitous males assuming women are subservient to men, Thanawi sees the roving female as the main danger. His text implies that it is no surprise that this female is the cause of a divorce in the traditional family she enters. Shabnam's danger, however, extends beyond "the thirteenth sin." She will marry a man who observes no conventions and ensures that his wife becomes a docile servant.

Much as Thanawi does, the narrator absolves her brother of responsibility for maintaining the well-being of his wife and their marriage. She watches Shabnam dance, and in her mind, Shabnam's body has the power to cast a spell on those watching: "...she swayed like an intoxicated female serpent.... Her waist was gyrating, her hips moved from side to side, her arms fluttered, her mouth was open and her lips quivered. She thrust her tongue out like a snake and licked her lips with it" (Chughtai, "The Quilt" 51). The focus is entirely on the woman's violations and marginally on the man's for engaging her. The narrator blames Shabnam for being shameless and dancing the samba publicly: "Bhaiya was standing in the verandah, massaging the back of his neck, and she was tormenting him with her teasing. ... Bhaiya's eyes were gleaming, he revealed his teeth in a grin. My heart convulsed" (51). The brother/husband appears to be a victim, both as the pawn of Shabnam's desire and because of his wife's failings.

Thanawi would likely agree with the narrator and point to Shabnam's transgressive behavior as the reason for the dissolution of Shehnaz's marriage. His reading of the situation would also ignore the male's culpability in illicit desire. Both inscribe the woman as the site of instability that must be contained within the home. Thanawi even recommends that women's spirituality be contained within the home. Book Seven in his thousand page text is "a pamphlet meant to instruct women and girls in the way to act" (173). In this chapter, Thanawi offers advice on how to deal with the nuances of daily life and decision-making as applied to "beliefs, legal points, ethics, and social behavior, child rearing and so on." Book Seven lists "proper behavior" for women and item fifteen provides an explanation on acceptable reasons for leaving the house:

On Women Going Out for Prayer:

15. The Messenger of God declared: "The best mosque for women is the inside of their houses." *Moral*: It is clear that it is not good for women to go to mosques. You should weigh the fact that although nothing is the equal of prayer, it is not considered good to go

out even for that. Surely, then, to go out of the house for foolish gatherings or for carrying out customary practices must be very bad indeed. (qtd. in Metcalf, "Perfecting Women" 206)

Thanawi's rhetoric positions the everyday against the religious and the practical against the spiritual. He solidifies the boundaries between women and the world outside the home by situating female religious expression within the home. He defines the proper Muslim female as someone who contains her universe within the home. With a great deal of irony, Chughtai demonstrates the power of the sexist husband to repeat the transformation of Shehnaz by Shabnam's equally dramatic transformation into his version of the domestic ideal.

Despite having witnessed one sister-in-law's transformation, the narrator appears stunned and unprepared for the transformation of the second. She reunites with her brother and Shabnam years later and, much to her avowed amazement, the beautiful and modern Shabnam is now an overweight and unattractive housewife:

Shabnam was singed, muddy-looking ash; her dark, gleaming complexion had turned yellow like a lizard's stomach; those liquid eyes had become murky and lifeless; the thin, serpentine waist was nowhere in sight – Shabnam looked permanently pregnant; the well-rounded arms that had glowed like the delicate, shiny limbs of a tree were now thick and ungraceful and looked like a pair of dumb-bells. (Chughtai, "The Quilt" 56)

The narrator uses images of decay to describe her sister-in-law. These changes are part of an all-encompassing body transformation: "Bad diet and anemia had given her plump cheeks the yellow-green look of a mummy. ... Viewed under the neon lights, her complexion made one think of someone bitten by a cobra." Gone is the power of a serpent. Instead, Shabnam's body exhibits the effects of living with the poisonous venom of a serpent bite. In the reversal of the serpent imagery, the narrator begins to fully explore the power dynamics in her brother's marriages. Faced with the transformation of her once ultramodern and hypersexual sister-in-law, the narrator is forced to realize that her brother is the force changing the attitudes and bodies of his wives. This realization does not come with condemnation, however, but a measured sense of

empathy for her handsome and controlling brother; he is repeatedly saddled with unattractive, obese wives.

The narrator's description of Shabnam's complexion is "one bitten by a cobra" foreshadows the death of this marriage and the introduction of yet another new partner. With this image she overturns the serpent simile she once used to describe Shabnam's sexuality. The cobra is no longer her sister-in-law, but her brother; and the power is no longer in Shabnam's body, but rather a latent sickness. Now an established pattern, another woman attracts the attention of the narrator's brother; the threat this time is an Egyptian dancer. As the dancer and Bhaiya begin to converse, the narrator observes the non-verbal terror taking over Shabnam, Bhaiya's present wife: "Restless, like a pair of wounded deer, her eyes darted in all directions" (57). At this moment, Shabnam's identity is replaced by her role as a wife: "Bhabi, who used to be Shabnam, who, like the Egyptian dancer, was once an electric current that burned Bhaiya, sat immobilized like a hill of sand" (56). The once sexually vibrant Shabnam sits still, powerless, in the face of her husband's betrayal. Her only recourse is the food which he indulged her in. In this scene, the transformation has come full circle and is complete; Shabnam repeats the same transformative cycle as her predecessor, Shehnaz.

The narrator registers that the deterioration of the wife's appearance has no effects on her brother's body: "I was searching in this heap of flesh for the sprinkle of dew, for the Shabnam who had doused the first of Shehnaz's love and ignited a new flame in Bhaiya's heart. But what was this? Instead of burning to a cinder in the fire of her love, Bhaiya had come out more burnished than ever, like gold" (56). She acknowledges that the wives are not responsible for these drastic transformations; her brother has an active part in ensuring their rapid domestication. The narrator is repeatedly presented with the idea that propriety in wifely behavior does not

necessarily elicit a similar behavior in husbands. She is exposed to the intricate relationships between husband and wife from an early age in the milieu of her childhood home. However, she never implicates her brother in the destruction of his wives.

Chughtai complicates Thanawi's presentation of the domestic as a safe space by showing how family life is interlaced with gender intricacies that its inhabitants cannot escape. The narrator's observations about Shehnaz's failure as a proper domestic, and Shabnam's temporary triumph as a roving female, bring into question Thanawi's admonitions for temperance and self-control. Chughtai highlights the double standard for wifely behavior and the dangers of such devotion. She criticizes the Muslim husband who behaves poorly. This critique is a subject mostly absent from Thanawi's texts. Exposure of the misbehaving husband is a theme repeated in Chughtai's stories, underlining the gap in expectations for proper behavior for men and women.

Discovering Homoerotic Desire in the Household of "The Quilt"

The household in "The Quilt" presents alternative readings of the husband-wife conflict, contradicting Thanawi's staid explication of marriage dilemmas. Chughtai complicates the interior space of a home populated with proper subjects; she reveals that circulating male desire within the home can disrupt the psycho-sexual self-control that Thanawi advised. The culturally accepted homosocial space of the *zenana* shelters the desires of both husband and wife without forcing either to outwardly challenge the normative expectations for middle-class households. They exist in an in-between space as violators and partial adherents to the values of a heterosexual, companionate marriage; they are neither Thanawi's ideal, nor completely liberal. "The Quilt" resignifies homosocial relationships within the household without changing any of heteronormal signifiers of the middle-class *zenana*.

At the center of “The Quilt” is a narrator’s recollection of an unusual home she was a part of as a child. The home she recollects is the household of her mother’s close friend, Begum Jan. Like the narrator in “The Rock,” the narrator in this story moves between her childhood memories and her thoughts as an adult. The narrator enters the text as a gender-bending child and sets the tone for the household she enters: “All day long I fought tooth and nail with my brothers and their friends. . . . all I could think of was fisticuffs with every known and unknown girl or boy I ran into!” (5). Unable to fit the mold for young girls, this girl is sent to the wealthy household of a Nawab⁷ and his Begum wife, Jan. She is sent to this home to learn how to behave appropriately. Jan is an “adopted sister” of the child’s mother, so it not unusual that the girl is with her “aunt” while her mother travels. The irony of the story is that Begum Jan’s household is the antithesis of proper domesticity as it brings together a husband enamored of male students and a wife who has an intimate relationship with a female housemaid.

Both husband and wife use socially acceptable pretenses to sanction their non-normative desires within their traditional marriage and household. Chughtai questions Thanawi’s prescriptions for an ideal household by exposing the gaps between public perception and private behaviors. By exposing that the private behaviors of members of this household generate a counterculture, Chughtai contests Thanawi’s warnings that women should not leave the home. In form, this husband is utterly unlike the husband of “The Rock.” He has none of the vices typical of men: “Nawab Sahib was noblesse oblige itself. No one had ever seen a dancing girl or prostitute in his home. He had the distinction of not only performing the Haj himself, but of being the patron of several poor people...” (5). However, his private life is quite different: “Nawab Sahib had a strange hobby. . . .all he liked to do was keep an open house for students;

⁷ Title used for landowner, usually someone made wealthy by collecting rent from tenant farmers.

young, slim-fair waisted boys, whose expenses were born entirely by him.” The interior space of his home reveals the husband’s desire for young men while his public behavior is exemplary. He marries, but sequesters his wife in her own quarters and continues to befriend male students. What remains uncontested is the husband’s right to create this interior life by virtue of his superior position in the domestic hierarchy. His private refusal to behave as a proper husband reverts the assumed order of the house: “the household revolved around the boy students and that all the delicacies produced in the kitchen were solely for their palates ... From the chinks in the drawing room doors, Begun Jan glimpsed their slim waists, fair ankles, and gossamer shirts and felt she had been raked over the coals!” (5). The wife’s relatives and the girl’s mother do not look past the exterior of this home that is headed by a religiously observant wealthy man. They willfully misread this household as a sanitized space where all members, including the wife, behave appropriately. These household residents are seen as role models for tradition. Gaytri Gopinath argues that the circulating desires in this story refute the idea of home as a “privatized, seemingly sanitized domestic space” (635). Instead, Gopinath paints it as “a site of intense female homoerotic pleasure and practice.” Gopinath’s main argument concerns the relationship between Jan and her housemaid. This argument could further be strengthened if it included an analysis of male homoeroticism as well.

Geeta Patel’s reading of the story’s subversive qualities recognizes dual homosocial environments. She reads Chughtai’s story as “a covert incursion into the home by a woman writer rather than in an acceptable display.... It called into question not only the ways in which the home/*zenana* had been produced but also the acceptable alternative representations of sexuality” (Patel, “Marking the Quilt” 187). The marriage between the Nawab and his wife complicates the advice provided by Thanawi in Book Eight, section two, “On Marriage.” The

heading “Amendment of Behavior” offers six sentences on how women can choose spouses with good character for their children. It additionally offers direction on the art of giving and receiving marriage proposals. Numbers four and six on this list relate directly to a wife’s relationship with her husband: “4. To discuss private matters of husband and wife with women friends and companions is very displeasing in the sight of Almighty God. Often, bride and groom do not take proper account of this” (qtd. in Metcalf, “Perfecting Women”183).The Nawab and his wife follow Thanawi’s adage in a limited sense because they do not in fact discuss their personal lives with anyone. Neither is there is any dialogue between the two partners which characterizes Begum Jan’s existence with her new husband. The Nawab indulges himself with his students while his wife finds herself ensconced within his home as the chief protector of her husband’s secret. Because of irreconcilable differences with her husband and the need to maintain the privacy of her home, Jan is isolated and ignored. Yet, within the space assigned to her, Jan satisfies her own desire. She exists apart from her husband but within her household. This uncommon and unseen domestic arrangement is what Chughtai sends her narrator to explore. This arrangement is outside Thanawi’s vision. Thanawi defines the exclusive nature of the relationship between husband and wife by declaring that their “private matters” are enclosed within the marital relationship and that the wife must align with her husband against other friends and companions.

The image of an elephant is used throughout the story as a metaphor for the physical relationship the narrator observes between the two women. This metaphor becomes a figurative refusal to label these women’s relations: “In the depth of winter whenever I snuggle into my quilt, my shadow on the wall seems to sway like an elephant. My mind begins a mad race into the dark crevasses of the past; memories come flooding in” (Chughtai, “The Quilt” 5). The

symbol of the elephant is a deliberate choice on Chughtai's part to underscore the unnamed relationship that will unfold in the story. The image of an elephant in doors and underneath a quilt becomes a metaphor for the nature of the fantastical relationship between the two women. That a landowner's wife would be physically or even socially intimate with her servant was outside the borders of polite society at the time the story was written.

Unlike the animal metaphors in "The Rock" that reinforced domestic stereotypes, the elephant simile used to describe these women allows for an ambiguous space, outside the registers of domesticity. Rather than stifling, the refusal to name the activity in the text leaves the quilt and its inhabitants in the realm of the fantastic. This realm actually frees their desire to operate outside standardized sexuality. The double identities of the Nawab and his Begum violate Thanawi's ideal of a heteronormative household. Chughtai pushes into the margins of daily choices to reveal the alternative identities men and women construct for themselves. "The Quilt" also reveals that sometimes this search can be mutually productive.

Begun Jan's relationship with Rabbo remains unnamed by the narrator except through the use of figurative language: "Once again the quilt started billowing. I tried to lie still, but it was now assuming such weird shapes that I could not contain myself. It seemed as if a frog was growing inside it and would suddenly spring on me" (12). The projection of the quilt's inhabitant onto the narrator is a feared yet longed-for event because she might be included in the secret activity, thereby gaining knowledge of it. Her ambivalence about these secret activities demonstrates a growing awareness of her own interest in what causes the quilt to contort: "The quilt, meanwhile, had entered my brain and started growing. ... The elephant somersaulted beneath the quilt and dug in. During the somersault, its corner was lifted one foot above the bed."

At this pivotal moment, the child is able to see what has caused the elephantine contortions in the quilt: “What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if they give me a lakh of rupees” (12). A narrative break at this crucial moment leaves open the possibility of unnamed desire for all three women: Begum, the maid, and the girl child. As Gopinath explains, this break in narrative at the critical moment of sight severs this homosocial relationship from sight:

The text resists posting the scene of desire between women as privileged or purely enabling site outside the hegemonic workings of the household and militates against an easy recuperation of any such space or undiluted resistance or subversion. . . . Chughtai evokes female homoerotic desire not only through images of satiation but through those of instability, greed, and excess as well. The space beneath the quilt, functioning as it does as a site of non-reproductive pleasure – one that has no use or value within a heterosexual economy of desire – can be figured only in terms of overindulgence and waste. (131)

Gopinath points out that the narrator’s ability to see but not name empowers the relationship between the Begum and her maid. Their homoerotic desire for women is shielded from categorizing or labeling. It exists outside the heteronormative structures used to describe desire. The non-naming of the space beneath the quilt also served a practical purpose when Chughtai was tried for writing obscene literature. The fact that the relationship between the women was not defined was critical to clearing Chughtai of all charges. The focus of the obscenity trial was the rendering of female-female desire; the objections to female homoeroticism underscore “the danger associated with the expression of female bodily desire” (Gopinath 131). Begum Jan and Rabbo occupy an in-between space that creates a new space that negates previous categories: “The residents of Chughtai’s story are not just sexualized, improper (Haram) women, women subjected to the uncivilized desires of a male. Neither are they proper, civilized (Haram) women denuded entirely of sexuality and thought of as such in some continuous form of past” (Patel, “Marking the Quilt” 187). These two women engage their sexuality outside of either category of

male formulated uses for female sexuality. Their failure to conform to male sexual fantasies or sanitized versions of womanhood consolidates personal control of their desires.

Feminist critic Gail Minault notes that the Urdu word *ismat* means “modesty, chastity, or honour” (“Ismat”129). Chughtai’s narratives wrestle with these definitions of female Muslim identity. She wrestles toward creating more vivid representations of women’s lives. Although characters such as Shabnam and Jan have varying degrees of success in exerting their non-normative behaviors, their misbehaving husbands problematize the ideas of gender and marriage in the Indo-Muslim context. In “The Rock” and “The Quilt,” both husbands and wives refuse to behave appropriately in the context of marriage. Chughtai’s unwavering focus on women and their cultural status and role in Indo-Muslim society investigates home life in upper-middle class households. She questions the domesticated housewife at the center of these homes while also bringing discursive weight to the role of husbands who previously existed only in the margins of Thanawi’s text. She uses childhood memories to frame anti-nostalgic narratives through which young women interpret daily life and thereby form concepts of gender and sexuality. These memories are living stories and learned lessons that intervene in discussions about domestic socialization, civility, and behavior codified by Thanawi as print material and intended to be read. Chughtai challenges prescriptive behavior for women by juxtaposing transgressing women against transgressing men in the experience of her narrators. These stories explore female sexuality within *zenana* life, reading the middle class home as a site where women negotiate sexual identity.

Chughtai’s re-reading of the *zenana* shows middle class women as independent agents wrestling with personal desire while making choices contrary to the rules for acceptable women’s behavior. As internal critics of domesticity, women destabilize the middle class home

by expressing their sexuality outside the bounds of patriarchal marriage. By using young female narrators, Chughtai establishes a double screen through which she explores the intricate relationships in the home while leaving surface domesticity undisturbed. However, the interest of these narrators in the choices and behaviors of adults indicates a growing awareness of gender politics and sexual desire. The narrators exhibit a burgeoning understanding of women's sexuality within the *zenana*.

Conclusion

Ismat Chughtai was one of two members of the Progressive Writers Movement who were censured for obscenity (the other writer was Sadat Hassan Manto). However, Chughtai brought more than notoriety to the PWA: as a writer of socialist literature in Urdu, her fiction challenged the contradiction of a uniform domesticity that restricted women's behavior within a system that allowed multiple positions to men (Patel, "Homely Housewives" 138). Chughtai used the aims of the PWA to examine the social implications of the engendered Muslim home. Defining women as "the guardian of national culture, indigenous religion, and family traditions" became important to Muslim reformers who were concerned with the preservation of minority identity within the majority cultures of Hinduism and British colonialism (Kumari 14). Chughtai's work exposes the home as a place full of interruptions and negotiations. She challenges the idea of home as a continuous and homogenously neutral space where culture is unquestioningly preserved and protected from colonial forces.

CHAPTER 3
“SEVERED SOUND”: AN EMOTIONAL SISTER IN ASSIA DEJBAR’S WOMEN OF
ALGERIS IN THEIR APARTMENTS

Assia Djébar's (1936-) position as a French-educated Arab woman forces her to negotiate multiple layers of identity: language, culture, and gender. These layers come to light in her female characters. Her fiction and essays have a foundation of a complicated woman-centered use of language. By placing women and their thoughts, feelings, and actions at the center of each narrative, Djébar recovers these characters ability to speak out from the silence imposed by national and colonial views of women. In her texts, she records women’s voices and their speech. Thereby, she exerts these women’s rights to speak their own thoughts and emotions. Her characters express grief and sorrow in emotional outbursts. These outbursts are a marked contrast to the image of the restrained heroic female freedom fighter used in nationalist rhetoric. In contrast to the languid images of harem residents stereotyped in colonial imaginary, these female characters are active and desiring agents.

Much like Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai, Djébar was aware of crossing the standards of propriety. Her assumption of the pen name, Djébar, was an effort to protect her family name from any public censure connected to her writing. Born Fatima Zohra Imalayene, she initially chose “Djébar,”¹ one of the ninety-nine salutatory names of Allah listed by the Prophet Mohammad. In translating the Arabic to the French, however, she changed the spelling and created a new word, “djébar” which translates as healer (Zimra, “Sounding Off” 110). The decision to change her name proved portentous. Her first novel *La Soif* or “The Mischief” was criticized for focusing on a young girl’s coming of age instead of the nationalist struggle which was already underway. Depicting sexuality, abortion, and feminine emotion, Djébar’s delineation

¹ Also written Al Jabbar, “The Compeller” or “All Encompassing One”; Qur’an 59:23.

of female emancipation from social strictures was not the kind of liberation that interested the nationalists. Although her later writings more than compensate for her original oversight, she remains committed to restoring women's voices, emotions, and experiences to public discourse.

The choice of French, the language of the colonizer, as the language of her writing may seem contradictory to Djébar's intentions to explore the Algerian experience. As Anne Donadey explains, Djébar's privileged upbringing is foreign to many of her fictional characters. Yet, her background serves to underscore the tenuousness of the Algerian conception of women and the position of the native intellectual within the postcolonial setting of North Africa (Donadey xix). Djébar's early fiction was criticized for not having nationalist concerns. It was also criticized for having a "nostalgic view of colonialism" (Lazreg 201). With closer examination, however, Djébar's fiction reveals the fissures between the national struggle for independence and the more personal circumstances of everyday life. In her work, Djébar also employs oral Arabic phrases and words, which de-center and disrupt the master narrative of her use of the language of the colonizer, French. The inclusion of Arabic within French sentences creates new space for the bifurcated identity of the colonized subject.

Her later work examines issues of gender and subjectivity during and after the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). Djébar sees the conflict as a localized one, focused on the appropriation of women's bodies for the nationalist cause. Women were encouraged to preserve national values by wearing a veil. However, they were also asked to replace their veils with modern dress if they were acting as messengers or bomb carriers and had to pass French checkpoints. In both instances, male nationalists framed these decisions based on assigned roles for specific women. Djébar's interest in the narratives of the individual against the collective

developed during her own participation as a writer for the F.L.N. revolutionary newspaper, *El-Moujahid*.

During the early years of the war she worked alongside Frantz Fanon, a Martinique psychiatrist, cultural theorist, and revolutionary leader. Fanon was editor of *El-Moujahid*. In his essay, "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon discussed the new woman created by the revolution. This new woman was one freed from the strictures of the home. He believed that the new support of revolutionary ideals opened up a space for the support of new ideals of gender roles. In several different scenes, he explains the need to end social restrictions of women for the sake of the nationalist movement. In one such passage, he describes how a father and the neighbors of a female freedom fighter embrace her decision to move outside the house unveiled, despite the radical nature of such an act:

The father was sooner or later informed. ... Different persons would have claim to have seen "Zohra or Fatima unveiled, walking like a ... My Lord, protect us! ..." The father would then decide to demand explanations. He would hardly have begun to speak when they would stop. From the young girl's look of firmness the father would have understood that her commitment was of long standing. The old fear of dishonor was swept away...
(40)

In this text, questions of personal and familial honor and social practices fade in favor of the greater national story--the fight for independence from colonizing oppressors. This rapid transition from traditional attitudes to radical attitudes regarding women's dress, mobility, and political solvency occurs because of the immediacy of the revolutionary moment. Dishonor is swept away as the young girl becomes infused with the power to assert herself in the nationalistic struggle.

This new kind of woman served as a symbol for which Fanon based the future of a liberated country: "Behind the girl, the whole family—even the Algerian father, the authority for all things, the founder of every value—following in her footsteps, becomes committed to the new

Algeria" (41). Fanon's presentation of "the girl" freedom fighter, however, marks this revolutionary woman with a limited sense of power. Her mobility is confined to the fight for the creation of a new nation state. Perhaps in large part to the changed dynamic of the family (generated by the revolutionary woman), Fanon saw women through their service to the revolution but also continued to see them as a figure for national purity.

For Fanon, the middle class threatens the project of revolution by blocking unity along rigid class lines. His fear of a middle class nationalism taking over after independence and establishing a neocolonial presence is palpable in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace. In its narcissism, the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country. But that same independence which literally drives it into a corner will give rise within its ranks to catastrophic reactions, and will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country. (63)

Fanon predicts that the middle class, in its rush to mimic the colonial presence, will replicate the role of the oppressing colonial presence. Even worse, the recently revolutionary middle class will now become a figure of solidarity with the former mother country in an attempt to recreate cultural imperialism. Fanon does not elaborate on this primacy given to class concerns. He does not examine that a contingent consequence of the rise of a national middle class may also ensure the continuance of other traditional social systems, such as patriarchy.

However, a foreboding sense of the limits on freedom, in particular for Algerian women, is a repeated theme in Djébar's narratives. One of Djébar's assignments as a *Moujahid* writer was to cover an Algerian refugee camp in Morocco (Sukys 120). Her interviews of those displaced by the conflict contrasted Fanon's idea of the role of women in the revolution and a continuous call to arms by freedom fighters. This shift in focus from nationalist aims to individual stories was an

artistic interest established early in her writing. Whereas Fanon mainly addressed women in their public roles (or at most, how they affected relations between father and daughter, or husband and wife), Djébar's fiction presents the interior lives of women and the emotional parameters in which decisions were made. Fanon's work on Algerian female subjectivity centers around the presence and presentation of the female physical body in public spaces and the degree to which it is used to serve the revolution.² While Fanon celebrates women's contributions to the revolution, Djébar offers a more complete and less idealized version of these revolutionary women; she focuses on the space of the home and the private. Djébar voices a contradiction during this moment of revolution by demonstrating the continuation of conservative values for most Algerian women. These conservative values contradict the revolutionary freedoms experienced by female revolutionary fighters. Only a certain number of unveiled and mobile women were needed by the state; the rest were encouraged to maintain their domestic roles and await a freed state. She explores the restrictions on women's emotional lives including forced veiling and requirements to stay within spatial enclosures.

Critical attention to Djébar's work has largely been focused on her novels and short stories (which feature female revolutionaries). In particular, the short story collection, *Women of Algiers in their Apartments*, has been cited as a healing narrative. This collection recovers the memories of a freedom fighter, Sarah, who was tortured during imprisonment. The title story fulfills some of the more conventional expectations for revolutionary narratives; the characters fill the lauded roles for women during the resistance movement such as fighter, messenger, and torture victim.

² For further feminist critique of Fanon see: Marina Lareg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Rita A Faulkner, "Assia Djébar, Frantz Fanon, Women, Veils, and Land." *World Literature Today* 70.4 (1996): 847-856; Kopola, Nelli.

Sarah's story is important in recovering the female experience of the resistance. Sarah and Anne, another survivor of the revolution, struggle to understand their experiences and to make sense of the post-revolutionary life. These struggles are emblematic of Djébar's interests in introspective exploration. The story is told in fragments, as recollections of memory which collide with present day action. It thus underlines the trauma that confronts these women in their daily lives—the trauma from being imprisoned and tortured. Djébar, however, is not only interested in these political experiences but also the experiences of non-combat women. For example, Sarah says:

For Arabic women I see only one single way to unblock everything: talk, talk without stopping, about yesterday and today, talk among ourselves, in all the women's quarters, the traditional ones as well as those in the housing projects. Talk among ourselves and look. Look outside, look outside the walls, and the prisons! ... the Woman as look and the Woman as voice ...not the voice of the female vocalists whom they imprison in their sugar-sweet melodies. ... but the voice they've never heard. (Djébar 84)

Sarah's exclamation to Anne in this title story reveals Djébar's equally concerted efforts to explore the lives of women who were either absent from, or not directly associated with, the resistance. Although Djébar presents a sustained investigation into various emotional realities of these female characters, the story largely ignores the majority of women who endured the revolution as civilians from the fringes of the fighting. As in the case of her first novel, *La Soif*, stories in this collection demonstrate Djébar's continued interest of how women's physical and psychological development are affected by social expectations.³

Other stories in this collection focus on interior monologues of women's narratives that are told within the spaces of their homes. These narratives highlight the interplay for Algerian women between the claims of nation, self, and home. Critic Veronica Best describes the women in Djébar's narratives are "buried alive" within the framework of their societies, and suffering an

³I choose to focus on other narratives in this collection as a means to further uncover Djébar's interest in women's emotions, behaviors, and psyche as they try to manage personal desires vis-à-vis familial expectations.

"incarceration" due to their inability to express themselves before the start of the story (873). In "Days of Ramadan" and "There is no Exile," Djébar explores these fringe experiences in a fashion that are more indicative of her interest in individual journeys. She exhibited this interest prior to public censure for writing personal narratives in the midst of a national struggle. Jane Hiddleston suggests that "Djébar's texts initially strive to unveil or conceive a specific feminine Algerian identity, rescuing Algerian women from occlusion both by colonialism and by Islamic law" ("The Specific Plurality" 372). Djébar's strategy for revealing this feminine Algerian identity is to construct a counter-character. This counter-character refuses her family's attempts to socially integrate her into the cultural role of women prior to the revolution. The tension between those who resist this return, and those promoting it, is evident in these two stories. Djébar questions how women exposed to change are forced back into tradition through the use of a counter-character within each family narrative. In doing so, she examines the various ways women are used against each other to enforce social dictates (Hiddleston, "Feminism" 92).

In "Days of Ramadan" and "There is no Exile," Djébar works through the contradictions of women's roles, which confine and restrain their personal expression in order to perpetuate traditionalist values and familial hierarchies. Through the use of the counter-character, a female member of the home who despite the restraints of her family indulges her emotions, Djébar exposes the stifling nature of domestic life during and after the revolution. This counter-character is an emblematic figure of women's dilemmas in the independent state. This character's self expression exposes her as different from the women around her. Her mothers and sisters attempt to discipline her into being the proper daughter/woman, but she resists by holding on to her emotions. Becoming emotional, sad, angry, and tearful, are signs by which the counter-character exerts her identity and refuses that of the well-behaved female. These "outbursts" mark the

counter-character as unruly in comparison to other female relatives who suffer in silence. This scenario marks a reversal of Freudian “feminine” hysteria where female emotions are often used as the justification for reading women as a weaker sex.

In Djébar’s text, emotion functions as an impulse towards freedom. Her counter-characters resist the imposition of silence in order to openly grieve their losses. Whether it is the death of a loved one or the failed promises of the new Algeria for its female citizens, in both stories there is a female resident who refuses to suffer in silence. The outbursts of these women mark them as truth tellers among other female relatives who pretend at normalcy. Excessive emotion becomes a political vehicle whereby characters challenge the domestic hierarchy (Nagy-Zekmi 2). In each story, a counter-character sister harbors desires which place her against patriarchal tradition; she is a liminal figure whose expression of a singular emotionally defined identity challenges collective ideals. These women wrestle with their memories of the revolution. In so doing they strain themselves and each other in “a continued struggle between the specific, the singular, and the plural” (Hiddleston, “The Specific Plurality” 371). The value of the individual against the family becomes important. Djébar configures gender as a separate category within the nationalist framework instead of a category that is co-dependent on the nationalist aims. The declaration of gender as a separate category empowers women’s voices—voices that were preciously overlooked and ignored.

The title story of this collection uses the title of a painting by Eugene Delacroix (1832). This use of title is Djébar’s subversive move to reclaim the interior life of women by refuting the static portraiture of women. Delacroix’s painting of three lounging women and one standing female servant is the cover for Djébar’s collection of short stories. Delacroix sold this piece, along with others like it as representative images of woman of the Orient. Images of these

women of the Orient were previously inaccessible to the gaze of those outside their families. The image of women painted by Delacroix typifies colonial interest in unveiling Algerian women; in the profitable exchange between two men - the painter and the owner of the artwork - the women serve as subjects defined and confined by their bodies on both sides. Isolated women, shown with averted eyes, create a universe where women are sterile, alienated, and subservient to the Western gaze. Colonized women were imprisoned not only by the confines of the harem, but also the perception of their bodies. As Veronica Best theorizes, women's bodies and subsequent veiling practices served as a means of imprisonment. Ideas of imprisonment are central to Djébar's texts; Djébar uses both fiction and her non-fiction essay to counter the separation of women from one another and society (875).

Djébar negates the painting's focus on stationary women by interrogating women's positions as silent subjects within Algerian society (Narin 506). Delacroix's painting participates in the Orientalist tradition which privileged the male, colonial desire to see into female spaces of colonized homes. Djébar's use of this painting of passive women, posed within their homes, interrogates women's passivity in the domestic setting (Donadey 108). Her stories feature female family members who struggle to find empowerment. Clarisse Zimra's question about the women in Delacroix's painting applies to the characters of Djébar's stories: "Who are these women, *really?*" ("Disorienting the Subject" 149). Delacroix featured women as languid bodies that were vulnerable to the male gaze, exposed in the exchange between the European painter and the Arab male who lets him into the home. The use of his painting as a book cover marks Djébar's concerted effort to contrast the frozen image of women with the stories of active women inside the home. The painting and stories are two texts through which Djébar refracts meaning: the painting is a colonial referent against which female characters struggle to maintain their own

identities. Djébar uses the well known painting as an overt move to “refuse[s] the eroticized stasis of the painting and the fetishizing gaze of the painter, and instead offers a series of conversations, fragments of stories and songs in which the lives of several women intersect” (Zimra, “Disorienting the Subject” 168).

The stories in her collection challenge what Djébar herself calls Delacroix’s “stolen gaze.” The multiple voices of her characters reconstruct Algerian women as moving, active, emotional women. She retrieves memory as a means of foregrounding women’s experiences of the Algerian revolution. These experiences no longer mythologize heroism, but instead acknowledge the problems in both colonial and nationalist views of women. She questions the “posing effect” evident in Delacroix’s painting and the traditionalist expectations of women in post-revolutionary Algeria.

Returning Home in Post-Revolutionary Algeria: The Absorbed Female Fighter

In “Days of Ramadan,” there are three sisters, Houria, Nfissa, and Nadjia, and their mother. Each character embodies a different aspect of hopes for the new nation. The sisters each have a different experience of the war. Houria is the eldest and a widow. Her husband was a freedom fighter killed in the war. Nfissa is the middle daughter who was a female freedom fighter, imprisoned and tortured for her part in the resistance. Nadjia is the youngest. She waits for the promise of change for women in a freed state. These three daughters each represent a different subject position in relation to war and independence. The father and brother of this family are alive but largely absent from the narrative; they exist in the margins of a narrative focused on the inner emotional lives of women. The story traces an afternoon in the life of this particular family during the Muslim holy holidays of Ramadan. During this month, families fast together during day light, and feast together at sunset.

Through Nadjia, Djébar focuses on the failed promises of change for women's freedom in an independent. Nadjia was a child during much of the revolution and a young woman during its final years. She occupies an in-between space which symbolizes the generation of women coming of age in a post-revolutionary period. She is too young to have been a freedom fighter and too young to have been married to a freedom fighter. Yet, she experiences the losses suffered by both of her sisters. Nadia thus expects fulfillment for the sacrifices of Nfissa, Houria's husband, and others like them. Her disappointment in the return to tradition is fully expressed, making her the only member of the family willing to indulge her dissatisfaction with life in the new state. Additionally, although Nadjia is the most vocal about it, Djébar hints that all of the sisters stopped participating in familiar rituals.

For each sister, the pleasure of previous Ramadan seasons was interrupted by the harsh realities of war. Houria's husband has died leaving her a childless widow and Nfissa was tortured and imprisoned. Nadjia is frustrated by the revolution's promises for a future of women's advancement. Djébar uses Ramadan as a connecting element between the family's happy past, the years of the revolution, and the experiences of the present. The mother tries to cajole her daughters into better spirits by reminding them that these harsh seven years are over and that the reinsertion of tradition will have a firm footing for their future in the new state. The four female characters have difficulty connecting to their seamless past—the years prior to the revolution. Due to their own perspectives on the intervening trauma of revolutionary bloodshed, not one of the sisters can fully access the prerevolutionary time in their lives. They reference it, but cannot connect with it. The mother, however, reinserts each daughter into the traditions of life prior to the revolution by reasserting the role of family in daily life. Thus the effect for each daughter is the same: the widow, the fighter, and the student are each brought back into the center of the

home, constructed as a place of safety for the resumption of their daily lives prior to the revolution.

Djebar compares and contrasts reactions to post-independence life through the attitudes of each sister in this family. The reactions of each daughter, expressed in an array of emotions, demonstrate the unease each has with this attempted reinsertion. Through a medley of sisters, Djebar presents a critique of how women are contained, coerced, and cajoled into assuming their roles within the family despite having other ambitions or desires. The tenuous relationship between gender and independence is hinted from the very start of the story. Even after independence, the sisters each harbor their misgivings about life in the new state:

“The first Ramadan away from suffering,” Lla Fatouna murmured, going back into her kitchen.

“It’s still all wrapped up in it, though,” Houria groaned softly.

Only Nfissa, pretending to read, heard her. She raised her eyes to their elder sister: twenty-eight and already a widow.

“If only he’d left me a child, a son who’d bring his image back to me,” she’d complained for months on end.

“Raising a child without a man, you’ve no idea what a bed of thorns that is!” the mother retorted. “You’re young, God will bring you a new husband, God will fill your house with a whole crop of little angels yet!” (Djebar 120)

In this narrative, the mother, Lla Fatouna, embodies the traditional views of women’s roles in society. She places her widowed daughter, Houria, back into the role of wife and mother. Lla Fatouna responds to Houria’s desire for her deceased husband (and the children they never had) by placing her in a new home as the wife of a new man. Lla Fatouna replaces Houria’s widow status by remarrying her. This strategy was common in a patriarchy where women were defined by their role as wives and mothers.

Despite the war's conclusion, suffering still configures the emotional landscape. For example, the first season of fasting after independence is "wrapped up in it" for Houria since it also marks the loss of her husband. Houria's longing for her husband or even "his image" marks her as someone who will continue to suffer unless she accepts her mother's remedy. She is allowed no space to grieve in the present, and must move ahead into a future where she continues her domestic roles as wife and mother. The consequences of the Algerian revolution and the deaths of freedom fighters and civilians, was a topic deemed unpatriotic to discuss.

The one hundred and thirty two years of uninterrupted colonialization by the French of Algeria made the colony an extension of the colonial state in the minds of many. November 1954 marked the beginning of the revolution. In the face of increasing numbers of French troops, the resistance took the fight into urban centers. Repeated retaliation resulted in civilian casualties on both sides in the thousands. Djebbar brings into focus this human cost of the entrenched conflict. Houria is not the only one who questions the post-independence life or the high price of freedom. Nadjia ascribes herself a political position alongside her warrior sister:

"I remember too! You may have been imprisoned, but I too was in prison, right here, in this very house you think is so wonderful."

Nadjia's voice became harsh; she jumped up, gave a short, sharp laugh, and stood stock-still, confronting Nfissa ready for a new quarrel.

"You're not going to start that again!" Nfissa grumbled, picking up her reading. (121)

What seems to be a normal fight between siblings is actually Nadjia's struggle with identity politics within her household. She carves out a space for herself as a "prisoner," the title that brings her sister honor in the community. Nfissa refuses to acknowledge this position. She ignores Nadjia's claim because Nfissa's label of "prisoner" reflects that she was an elite member of the resistance movement which included only a few thousand fighting women (Amrane-Nuinne 62). This moment of family squabble is interrupted by their mother, who reminds Nadjia

of the religious reasons she must behave properly (but, in helpless sadness, Nadjia shrugged her shoulders at her mother's words): "If you're going to get angry, well then, your fast will count for nothing!" Lla Fatouma, in her bright voice, interjected from the kitchen" (121).

Nadjia's desire for equal footing with her sister is also a desire for acknowledgement that she too has sacrificed her interests during the nationalist movement. Nadjia's desire for the acknowledgement of her suffering and sacrifice is overridden by her mother's warning. Lla Fatouma warns Nadjia that the Ramadan fast will be negated by the continued arguing between the two sisters. Nadjia is the figure of the modern woman in this story; she is a woman who waits to be fully integrated into society as a break from her sequestered role during the colonial period. Her mother interprets and interrupts her daughter's desire:

Lla Fatouma, without having heard the conversation, had understood: during the last two years of the war, the father had made Nadjia stop her studies. Since the independence, she wanted to pick them up again, wanted to go to the city and work, be a teacher or a student, no matter, but be working: a family drama was brewing. (121)

This family drama is emblematic of women who expected social change to accompany political change:

Nadjia greeted the arrivals, exchanged the interminable formulas of politeness with them, then vanished. To Nfissa, who came in vain to bring her back: "No!" she snorted, "All that babbling, eating cakes, gorging oneself before morning, is that why we've suffered bloodshed and mourning? Now, I won't have it ... I ...," and her voice was filled with tears, "I though you see, that all this would change, that something else would happen, that ..." Nadjia burst out crying, pushed her face into her pillow, on the same bed she'd slept as a child. (122)

Nfissa leaves the room without answering and Nadjia's outburst is represented as a child's temper tantrum; her face in the pillow, crying, "on the same bed she'd slept as a child." The fact that Nadjia is not taken seriously and viewed as a child demonstrates her static position within

the household, despite her desire to be recognized as an adult woman. She resists joining the gathering of female visitors, who serve as ancillary figures to that of the mother, as they return to gossiping, feasting, and visiting one other social pleasantries lost during the instability of war. The continuance of social niceties and feasting after sundown are offensive to Nadjia who cannot reconcile social platitudes with the cost of human life.

Nfissa's silence is an ambiguous response from her position as a publicly recognized member of the resistance movement. She does not challenge her sister's despair at the lack of social change, but she rejoins the group of women visitors. Nfissa identifies reasons for celebration: "For the seven years of the war, everyone has been staying at home," one of them began. "With our daughter in the hands of the enemy, how could we possibly bring ourselves to drink coffee!" another exclaimed, referring to Nfissa and showering her with blessings. (122). To the gathering women, the very presence of Nfissa is proof that the nationalists have overcome the efforts of the colonialists to keep the freedom fighters imprisoned. However, a brief glimpse into Nfissa's thoughts suggests that her movement is not into the future, but into the past. She psychologically reclaims the moments before the violence of decolonization: "[A]gain, Nfissa's mind is analyzing, then wanders haphazardly through memories – before, during the same season, she and Nadjia couldn't wait to start fasting.... Before, it was only yesterday..." (119). For Nfissa, time has collapsed. She remembers her life before the war has psychologically erased the seven years of war that intervene between prewar days and the present. She describes "before" as a time that was "only yesterday." She thinks about the shared experience she and Nadjia had as children, waiting to be allowed to fast during Ramadan with the adults. The beginning of fasting marks a child as an entrant into the adult religious community. She recalls this moment as a shared longing with her sister. The war separated them and Nfissa moved into another stage of

adulthood. She moved to a stage of outward political resistance; this stage was denied to her young sister. Her memory of their childhood is bittersweet because it looks backward to before their separation, before the war. Nfissa's memory is heavily nostalgic, even during her recollections of imprisonment:

Yesterday, Nfissa had been in prison ... Ramadan among the truly sequestered, that prison in France where they had been grouped together, six "rebels" –they said—who would be judged.

They had begun the fast with the cheerfulness of the ascetic: exile and chains had become immaterial, a deliverance from the body that turns around in circles inside the cell but suddenly no longer runs up against the walls; two French women who'd been arrested in the same network had joined the Islamic observance and, despite the blandness of the evening soup, how peace of mind superseded the gray hours, how the evening song, despite the guards, seemed to clear the distance across the sea, to reunited them with their country's mountains! (120)

Her reverie romanticizes the circumstances of her imprisonment; she remembers overcoming the climate, the guards, and the distance, to connect with the land or "their country's mountains."

The glossy memory Nfissa allows herself is circumspect given the likelihood her imprisonment included torture. Her silence is indicative of the ambivalence regarding female fighters both by the nationalist leadership and in public discourse. Djébar suggests that a female fighter is necessarily forced to forget her experiences.

The act of remembering is equally uncomfortable for the other characters in the story. For example, one of the visiting women is also marked by loss she experienced through the war: "If only you could smother the memory!" an old woman who had lost her two sons in the war, was saying in the middle of the general conversation, "then you might be able to rediscover the Ramadans of before, the serenity of before" (122). This woman verbalizes her desire to do what Nfissa has been able to do. For the old woman, the time before the war and today are not erased from memory. Instead these years are marked by the loss of her two sons. She cannot as easily escape the knowledge of the last seven years to feel that "before" is as close as "yesterday."

Her remark is greeted by the other women with an assenting silence: “A silence fell, uncertain, imbued with regret” (122). This silence and regret looms because these women cannot access their previous lives before the hardships exile and the loss of loved ones. In order to remember the days before their losses, these women must “smother memory,” including memories of the revolution itself. This insistence on a nostalgic view of the past overlooks the tension of colonial life and erases the pain of the resistance movement. This nostalgic view is a move to situate women within their homes and families in an unbroken continuity governed by duty and obligation. A life lived with family and according to familial wishes is the very thing which the family members of the narrator in “There is No Exile” encourage her to do.

Family Politics in Post-Revolutionary Algeria: An Absorbed Widow

In “There is No Exile,” Djébar again employs another counter-character amidst the frame of three sisters and a traditionalist mother. She uses this frame to interrogate the experiences of families exiled during the war. In this story, there is the eldest sister, Aicha, who is a wife of a revolutionary. Unlike Houria, Aicha’s husband is still alive and operating in Algeria on behalf of the resistance movement. A middle sister, the first person narrator of the story, is a widow and bereaved mother who lost her loved ones during the revolution. The youngest sister, Ainssa, is the opposite of the raging Nadjia from “Days of Ramadan.” Ainssa attempts to be a peacemaker in her family. The narrator, however, rejects this role of her younger sister. Similar to Lla Fatouna, the mother in this narrative is a traditionalist. There are also women visitors who function as ancillary to the mother’s role of preserving culture. Additionally, there is Hafsa, a character who becomes supplemental to the three sisters because she experiences a range of emotions in response to the revolution.

The families in “There is No Exile,” have been living in exile since the revolution started. Both the families of the three sisters and of Hafsa await the end of the war so they can return to

their country. Life in exile means that the pain and the loss of the revolution are current. The demonstrated experience of the pains and losses in this story differ from “The Days of Ramadan” because the latter relies on heavy memories rather than present endurances.

The overt silencing of the female narrator in “There is No Exile” is more sharply drawn than in the instance of Nadjia or Nfissa. Nadjia and Nfissa are gradually forced to acquiesce to patriarchal roles through the gentle suggestions of other women. In this story, however, the mother and eldest sister actively restrict the widowed narrator’s expressions of grief. They override her assertion that she will not marry. In short, exile means impoverishment and economic hardship. In such close quarters there is little tolerance of private dissent against the domestic order. In exile, even more so than in independence, women must stay inside their parameters in order to make life more manageable.

As the day begins in this narrative, everyone in the house hears mourning cries from the house next door; there has been a death in the neighboring family. Although family members attempt to distract her from the cries, the narrator cannot help but to hear them. Unlike the neighbors, the outward expression of grief has been denied to the narrator. The cries from the home next door, and her focus on them, are an expression of the narrator’s private monolog, a monolog which no one else can access. She keeps returning to the sound of the crying as a way to express her own inner emotions. She clearly suffers from grief and depression associated with the loss of her family. Everyone in the narrator’s immediate environment, however, prepares to introduce her to a prospective groom. Against her wishes, the prospective groom’s female relatives come for a visit. During this visit, the narrator finally breaks down, crying out that she does not intend on marry ever again. Her outburst is ignored by everyone, including the perspective groom’s relatives. The story concludes as the narrator is told her mother has

promised her in marriage. Djébar's illustration of the family's severe treatment of the narrator demonstrates the limited choices for impoverished families living in exile during the revolution. She explores the narrator's inner life as a way of rewriting daily life in a restricted setting. By the end of the story, the narrator's outburst, despite being overlooked, has been voiced as raw pain. This voicing is how Djébar addresses the silence of a widow's loss during the bloody years of war.

Hafsa's position in regards to the revolution is not as clearly defined. She has shifting perspectives that show a variety of attitudes. Her position is complicated by the politics and emotions of exile:

Hafsa arrived. Like us, she was Algerian and we'd known her there, a young girl of twenty with an education. She was a teacher, but had been working only since her mother and she had been exiled, as had so many others. "An honorable woman doesn't work outside her home," her mother used to say. She still said it, but with a sigh of helplessness. One had to live, and there was no man in their household now. (121)

Hafsa's occupation is an acceptable one for women; she is a tutor for the eldest sister, Aïcha.

Hafsa's mother, however, still clings to a pre-revolutionary status quo where women's honor is protected by their staying in doors. Although Hafsa is working, her tutoring another Algerian woman places her within the home and allows her to maintain some semblance of tradition.

However working outside the home becomes a necessity for Hafsa.

Hafsa is an in-between figure. Although she can work outside the home, she voices nationalist ideals: "Remember," she says, "the day we return to our own country, we shall all go back home, all of us, without exception." For Hafsa, still in exile, Algeria's independence will include reunion in the nostalgic homeland where everything will be restored. She reminds her sisters that their downtrodden condition in exile will be consumed by the joy of returning to their native land:

“The day that we return,” Hafsa, standing in the middle of the room, suddenly cried out, her eyes wide with dreams. “The day that we return to our country!” She repeated. “How I’d like to go back there on foot, the better to feel the Algerian soil under my feet, the better to see all our women, one after the other, all the widows, all the orphans, and finally all the men, exhausted, sad perhaps, but free—free! (66)

Hafsa’s reverence cannot mistake the cost of the war. She lost her father and she cannot avoid mentioning “all the widows, all the orphans” gathering together after the war. Her impromptu speech continues, and carries with it, praise for the revolution and the sacrifice of the people:

“And then I’ll take a bit of soil in my hands, oh, just a tiny handful of soil, and I’ll say to them: “See, my brothers, see these drops of blood in these grains of soil in this hand, that’s how much Algeria has paid for our freedom and for this, our return, with her own soil. But her martyrdom now speaks in terms of grace. So you see, my brothers...” (69). This momentary recognition of personal sacrifice is overridden by glorifying liberty. Hafsa ends her speech by praising the homeland, Algeria, which is personified by the drops of blood in the soil. These martyrs are not solid figures for Hafsa, however; she idealized figures in her still forming perceptions about the war:

“My God,” she said, emotion in her voice. “I’ve just turned twenty and yet I’ve never encountered death. Never in my whole life!”

“Haven’t you lost anyone in your family in this war?” Ainssa asked.

“Oh yes,” she said, “but the news always comes by mail. And death by mail, you see, I can’t believe it. A first cousin of mine died under the guillotine as one of the first in Barberousse. Well, I’ve never shed a tear over him because I cannot believe that he’s dead. And yet he was like a brother to me, I swear. But I just can’t believe he’s dead, you understand?” she said in a voice already wrapped in tears. (69)

The bravado of this speech gives way to Hafsa’s real distress. She breaks down when confronted with the facts of death. Although “death by mail” separates her from the reality of death, the unceasing cries next door force her to confront this harsh reality. The inconsistency in Hafsa’s

viewpoints reveals the double edge of nationalism for women who were not directly involved in the fighting.

Hafsa's conflict is exposed by her ideological support for the revolution alongside her inability to fathom the realities of the violence which constitute the war. For example, she does not view the death of her cousin; instead, she is notified by mail. Hafsa cannot grieve for her cousin because physical separation creates an unwillingness to acknowledge the consequences of entrenched struggle. Yet, she is sad, her "voice already wrapped in tears." She does, however, declare her self-avowed failure to "shed a tear over him." Thus Hafsa demonstrates her inability to reconcile personal sorrow within the desire to return to a free Algeria.

Her vision of the future compartmentalizes grief. She imagines she will one day see: "all the widows, all the orphans, and finally all the men, exhausted, sad perhaps, but free—free!" There is no room for grief over her dead cousin in this line of survivors; he is present in the "drops of blood in these grains of soil in this hand, that's how much Algeria has paid for our freedom." Her cousin, who was like a brother, becomes enveloped in the land.

It is clear that each sister experiences the war differently. In her contrasting emotions of pride and grief, Hafsa emerges as an ambivalent figure that partially understands the war and partially resists acknowledging its costs. Her youngest sister, Ainssa, however, is less ambivalent: "Those who die for the Cause aren't really dead," Ainssa answered with a touch of pride. "So, let's think of the present. Let's think about today," Aicha said in a dry voice" (69). Ainssa is cut short by her elder sister, Aicha, who is married to a revolutionary fighter. Aicha resists the posthumous glory for those "who die for Cause." She resists the idea of glory in the death of a freedom fighter because her husband's death would result in a social death for her. It would leave her a widow despite the honorable rhetoric which would surround his service to the

revolution. Aicha's strategy is to focus on daily activities. This strategy belies her understanding of the entrenched nature of the resistance movement. She dares not look ahead to a moment of Algerian liberation or a time of return to her home nation. She focuses on living day to day because she is unsure of when Algeria might be liberated or if her husband might be alive. The contrast between Aicha, Ainssa, and Hafsa demonstrates varying and complicated responses to exile and prolonged fighting.

For the narrator, the war is colored by the death of her husband and children. These losses mark her exile. They mark her exile not only in a literal sense from her homeland, but also in a figurative sense from the experience of living. She feels suspended between life and death. She is biting in her remarks about her mother's inability to shed the social niceties of their life before exile: "Hafsa found mother and Ainssa in the process of preparing pastries, as if these were a must for refugees like us. But her sense of protocol was instinctive in Mother; an inheritance from her past life that she could not readily abandon" (65). The narrator continuously seeks concrete terms to explain her life; she expresses frustration at the fuss being made over pastries in the midst of their poverty. She is marked by her loss and refuses all attempts by her mother to reinstate her in society. The mourning of the family next door allows the narrator to express the grief her family wants her to hold inside. She listens to it and revels in the sounds: "The weeping continued. I'd attended to the meal while listening to the threnody and its modulations. I was growing used to them" (63). The rest of the family is disturbed by the open expressions of grief, believing that it portends bad luck. The narrator, however, embraces the cries. She focuses on them and they become a part of her own grieving:

The sobs outside seemed more muffled, but I could still distinguish their singsong. Their gentle singsong. This is the moment, I said to myself, when grief becomes familiar and pleasurable, and nostalgic. This is the moment when you weep almost voluptuously, for

this gift of tears is gift without end. This was the moment when the bodies of my children would turn cold fast, so fast, and when I knew it. (63)

The narrator's silence is read by the family as her movement into grief. They attempt to resist it by expressing their ideas about proper displays of grief. First, her mother negates the idea of a "gift of tears" by mentioning all those who die without anyone's tears: "At home, in the mountains," Mother answered, "the dead have nobody to weep over them before they grow cold." The narrator is confronted with the dead who sacrificed themselves for the resistance. Their bodies are worth honoring and remembering because of their willingness to die for a liberated Algeria.

The implication here is that the narrator's children have received their due mourning and it is now time to move forward. The youngest sister's position is even more unrelenting on grief: "Weeping serves no purpose," Ainssa says stoically, "whether you die in your bed or on the bare ground for your country." For Ainssa, who has never been a mother or lost a child, death is impersonal. It exists as an unemotional fact. She resists the personalization of death as a survival mechanism while her family is in exile. The family's female guests also remark on the neighbors' grief:

It was already four o'clock in the afternoon when they came in. From the kitchen where I was hiding, I heard them exclaim, once the normal phrases of courtesy had been uttered: "What is that weeping?"

"May misfortune stay far away from us! May God protect us!"

"It gives me the goose bumps," the third one was saying. "I've almost forgotten death and tears, these days. I've forgotten them, even though our hearts are always heavy." (63)

These female guests serve as a culturally stabilizing force in the story. They are there to arrange a marriage between their male relative and the widowed narrator. In this sense, they continue traditional practices of courtship. In their reaction to the mourning next door, the women react in a way that mimics the narrator's female family members. They reject the idea of crying as free

expression of grief because it reminds them of their own grief and exile. During their life in exile, the women have been able to move difficult memories from the forefront. They cannot completely forget “death and tears” because, if they forgot, the ongoing revolutionary struggle and those dying in the resistance would be less profound. Instead, these memories of lost loved ones, and the violence that drove them into exile, make their “hearts always heavy.” These memories however are pushed into the background.

This sidelining of grief is a strategy employed by all the women of this story except for the narrator. She is unable to find a coping mechanism for the loss of her children and husband. Everyone who surrounds her dissuades her from dwelling on them. For example, Anissa attempts to instill the reliance on fact and reversal of personal reflection in the narrator:

“What are you thinking?” Anissa said, her eye still on me.

“Nothing, I said feebly; then, after a pause: “I was thinking of the different faces of fate. I was thinking of God’s will. Behind that all, there is a dead person and women going mad with grief. Here, in our house, other women are talking of marriage ... I was thinking of that difference.”

“Just stop ‘thinking,’ Aicha cut in sharply. (67)

The narrator is forced into silence because placed into a suffocating position in between her emotionless sisters. On the one hand, the narrator confesses her worry that life is constantly juxtaposing events of celebration and despair and that her turn at the wheel is not yet over. Her sisters, however, are both resistant to her grief. Aicha commands the narrator to stop dwelling on “difference.” For Aicha and Anissa, “the different faces of fate” are better if they are not contemplated but ignored. The narrator’s grief is ignored and the family makes preparations for her to remarry another Algerian man whose family is also exile. The narrator resists this movement forward into reinventing her role as a wife and mother. During a viewing of the potential bride, the narrator, she is brought before the prospective groom’s female relatives. The

continual silencing by her sisters stops at this crucial moment in match making and the narrator has an unconventional outburst:

“I don’t want to marry,” I said. “I don’t’ want to marry,” I repeated, barely shouting. ... “It’s not because of your son,” I said. “But I don’t want to get married. I see the future before my eyes, it’s totally black. I don’t know how to explain it, surely it must come from God. ... But I see the future totally black before my eyes!” I said again, sobbing, as Aicha led me out of the room in silence. (67)

Aicha’s silence at this moment is likely due to both displeasure and her own foreboding about a future moment where she may to be widowed and required to remarry. The narrator’s vision of the future is an expression of someone experiencing prolonged trauma. She is unable to look ahead and cannot look back. Her break from this code of silence enforced on her by her family during the formal pre-marriage visit by future in-laws signifies her desperation to be left alone to grieve. The family’s efforts to silence the narrator in this story echoes Djébar’s overarching concern with the enclosure of women in the house after the revolution. This character embodies the literal overlooking of preferences, emotions, and empowerment as her family initiates a marriage that will contain her once again as a wife and child-rearer. The narrator in this story, and Nadjia and Nfissa from “Days of Ramadan,” each experience a variation of domestic containment designed to teach them their rightful place within a larger family. This containment situates them within the life of the home. This interior space is what Djébar sought to explore, reclaim, and restore to women’s in these two stories and in her entire collection.

Conclusion

For Djébar, the revolutionary conflict is not primarily a nationalistic conflict, but instead a localized one focused on the women of postcolonial Algeria. For Frantz Fanon, independence would mean Algerian women were free from the threat of colonial "rape" or being unveiled by the French. Yet Djébar poists a threat in the independent Algeria, where women must fear the threat of her own countrymen who object to the non-veiled, post-revolutionary female body:

“The body moves forward out of the house and is, for the first time, felt as being “exposed” to every look: the gait becomes stiff, the step hasty, the facial expression tighten” (139). Djebbar predicts and critiques a return to conservative values for Algerian women. In her fiction, she explores the city of Algiers as a place where women are kept veiled both literally and metaphorically. They are veiled by the physical places where they live, including their apartments, homes, and bedrooms. In the absence of revolution, the unveiled mobile woman is a threat. Without veils to constrain her, she becomes a site of power--the power of looking:

[T]he feminine glance, liberated to circulation outside, runs the risk at any moment of exposing the other glances of the moving body. As if all of a sudden the whole body were to begin to look around, to “defy,” or so men translate it. ... Is a woman—who moves around and therefore is “naked” –who looks, not also a new threat to their exclusive right to stare, to that male prerogative? (139)

This “naked” or unveiled woman is a non-revolutionary woman without state support; without French oppression she becomes the new threat to the politicized Algerian male who wants to reassert traditional values. Instead of her body serving as an allegory for a cultural struggle between French colonizers and Algeria, her veiling and unveiling (dictated by the needs of nationalist rebels) becomes an opposition to the traditional imposed control of women.

The unveiled body exists as a site of resistance, not to colonial masters, but to male hegemony and the idea of mobility as privilege:

... no sooner will the lacy face veil, then the long body veil, be lifted, than the woman will (she can't help it) move on to the stage of fatal risk, that of uncovering the other eye, the eye-that-is-sex. Half way down the slippery path, he glimpses the only stopping point of the “belly dance,” the one that makes the other eye, the navel-eye grimace in the cabarets. Thus the woman's body, as soon as she leaves her seated waiting in the cloistered interior, conceals dangers because of its very nature. Does it move around in an open space? All that is suddenly perceived is that straying multiplicity of eyes in and on that body. (140)

Women were defined by their relationships to their male relatives; the hypothetical “he” that Djebbar uses is the man whose wife or sister would attempt to unveil herself. Moving against the dictates of culture, personal choice to unveil makes a woman's body a constant site of power.

She becomes more than a fixed metaphor for a nation; she becomes an unveiled mobile woman with power. This power comes from a “multiplicity of eyes” that are found in the rest of her body; she gains access to her full rights in the new state. Djébar’s work portends the resurgence of conflict in Algeria in the late 1980s as Islamists and secularists battled for dominance. During this time, women’s roles in society reemerged as a contested issue.

CHAPTER 4 BETWEEN WOMEN AND THEIR BODIES: MALE PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE PARTITION EXPERIENCES

Like her contemporary Ismat Chughtai, Khadija Mastur (1927-1982) was a member of the Progressive Writers' Movement. Similar to Chughtai's work, Mastur's narratives show an interest in women's lived experiences. However, Mastur goes beyond Chughtai's domestic narratives by showing an increased interest in the socio-economic issues of lower-class Muslim women in 1940s India. Influenced by historical events, Mastur and her contemporaries explored the relevance of art when grappling with violence, destruction, and social disintegration. She became interested in the consequences of the Partition of India in narratives investigating how gender roles legitimized violence against women. She also explored the consequences of this violence for male survivors. She moved between subtle and explicit narratives, at points specifying, at other points leaving out the religious identities and specific locales. This movement between undefined and defined settings and actors underscored the chaos as rampant looting, murder, abductions, and rape broke out as communities became increasingly religiously divided across the along subcontinent.

In August 1947, an independent India was established and a Muslim homeland, Pakistan, was created. The Partition of India, as this event became known, was accompanied by violence across the subcontinent. This violence divided communities along religious lines. People left behind their homes, possessions, and loved ones as they sought safety within the newly defined borders. Between eight and ten million people migrated to places marked exclusively by religious identity (Narasimhan-Madhavan 396). They migrated from places where their families had lived for generations. The religiously defined national boundaries created vortexes; Hindus abused Muslims and Muslims retaliated. Between five hundred thousand and one million people died. Amidst this mass migration of people, thousands of women became victims of abduction,

rape, and death (Butalia, “Community, State and Gender” WS12). Some estimate the number of abducted and raped women around to be around 75,000 (Butalia, “The Other Side” 3).

For the PWA, the unfathomable violence, often committed by neighbor against neighbor, was a clarion call for artistic intervention. Writers struggled with the “inherent inexplicability” of such widespread trauma (Chakrabarty 113). In the stories of both Indian and Pakistani writers, the Partition was constructed as “traumatic,” “monstrous,” and “irrational.” Susie Tharu, feminist critic of South Asian literature, argues that these narratives expressed disbelief in the magnitude of the disruption (Tharu 69). Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, like Tharu, see Partition literature as necessary for understanding what is defined as a historical or political event. They go even further by asserting that Partition literature “validates historical truth precisely in its power to represent” the stories of thousands of people affected by the largest mass migration in the history of the subcontinent (23).

Despite the horrific nature of prevalent abuses against women, abuse does not figure prominently in Mastur’s narratives. Her stories map violence as a set of complex issues that converged during the dissolution of communities. She elaborates on themes of abduction and rescue, and rape and pregnancy—themes which were recorded in literary representations and national documents of 1940s India. The stories mirror the historical record while challenging engendered readings of the dichotomies of power. This dichotomy was evident when woman are raped with impunity. Mastur synthesizes thousands of accounts of Partition violence into narratives exploring the abuse of women during this time period. She uses the plight of vulnerable women confronting enraged men to provide a window into the effects of violence on male and female members of society. Her narratives reveal that men were often as powerless as women when it came to preventing rape, abduction, or murder. Mastur’s stories explore how the

dissolution of communal unity aided in the perpetration of violence. In doing so, they highlight how not just the body “but also the body’s place in the world became a site of trauma” (Kabir 179).

In the short stories “They are Taking Me Away, Father, They are Taking Me Away” and “The Miscreant,” Mastur presents two very different accounts of the rape and abduction of women during Partition. The former is a linear story depicting a random female abduction which could have been taken from any number of newspaper accounts and is colored by the regret of a male witness. The latter features an intricate plot focused on life in a rural village where a peaceful multi-religious community splits apart in the wake of unfounded rumors of violence orchestrated by a wealthy landowner. Through these two very different scenarios, Mastur touches on the range of differences in types of violence. In “They are Taking Me Away, Father, They are Taking Me Away,” she highlights the accidental quality of some of the violence during social unrest. Marauding men come upon a single woman and carry her away against the protests of a powerless male onlooker. The victim just happened to be in the wrong place and the wrong time. In contrast, “The Miscreant,” tells the story of how a group of men are deliberately manipulated into violence by communal politics. Read together, these narratives underscore that, the devastating consequences of violence for women.

In each story, Mastur uses the rape of the female body as the basis for a cultural critique of women’s position in the family, community, and nation. In her view, rape “illustrates an extreme manifestation of the societal view of women’s sexuality” wherein female sexual purity is constantly in need of protection from violation (Kabir 179). Mastur investigates the fine line between the rhetoric that protects the female body and the logic that urges violence against it. Women’s bodies are alternately protected and threatened by men and male gender roles.

Both stories are told from the male perspective. This perspective is necessary because the female characters are either killed or abducted. The use of the male perspective, however, is also Mastur's purposeful intervention into this traumatic period of the subcontinent's history. By focusing on male reactions to the violence against women, she demonstrates that "men and women alike shared this fragmented and fugitive reality" of unimaginable horror (Kabir 179). She highlights the impasse between the male character's disavowal of violence and his inability to change societal attitudes. Mastur's intent is not to create a master narrative by which Partition experiences can be understood. Instead, she frames the emotional and moral responses to unspeakable tragedy in a manner that moves past numerical summaries of violence. She raises questions of ethical human behavior on the level of the individual.¹ Both the female and the male characters are narrowly defined as long as women are markers for familial and personal honor, and national and religious identity. The male characters in both stories are defined by their responsibility to protect the female bodies nearest them. Mastur explores the ways in which relationships with women--whether as brother, fiancée, or defensive agent of the state--define the responsibility of men to protect the honor of the female body. Mastur uses the proximity of the female body in relation to the male protector as a means of uncovering the complex situational cues which framed individual choices during this turbulent period.

The Abducted Female During Partition: Historical Fact and Literary Figure

In "They Are Taking Me Away, Father, They Are Taking Me Away," a young male aid worker witnesses a woman's abduction as communal violence escalates. The worker, who remains unnamed, comes across a roving mob of men trying to enter a locked building. Their rhetoric calls for retaliatory violence in order to avenge the violation of female family members.

¹ David Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan and South Asian History: In Search of Narrative." *The Journal of South Asian Studies* 57, no. 4. (1998): 1070.

The aid worker persuades the mob to let him enter the building first, hoping to save any inhabitant. When they discover the person hiding inside is a young woman, the mob cannot be deterred. The young man is powerless as the mob takes the girl, presumably to rape and kill her. He is deeply affected by what he saw. The subtlety of this story lies in the fact that both the city and the religious identity of the characters remain unidentified. Mastur leaves out these details in order to call attention to the actual abduction of a human being and critique the thousands of abductions in the historical record. Vague clues in the setting of this story foreground the impact of violence on the individual, regardless of religious affiliation. In the scramble to move to the appropriate political-religious affiliate (Hindus to India, and Muslims to Pakistan), women of both communities were dislocated and subjected to violence.

The young woman at the center of “They Are Taking Me Away, Father, They Are Taking Me Away,” waits for her beloved, cherishing a letter in which he promises he will come soon. Differing aspects of patriarchy render this female powerless. Having miraculously survived acts of violence against other building inhabitants, the woman waits for her lover. She is then confronted by a rapacious mob. The male aid worker, who tries to come to her rescue, is also powerless and at the mercy of the mob. By investigating the emotions of the survivor/witness, a male aid-worker, the story emphasizes the thin line between the roles of protector and violator. Critic Alok Bhalla explains Partition narratives look beyond stories of violence to stories of sensibilities, of how people internalized rapid changes in their communities. His reading of Partition stories rephrases the tradition of fictional moral inquiry also present in this genre:

One turns to a historian or a novelist, not to learn how to add sorrow on sorrow, but to hear in “unqualified horror or despair” the more difficult cadence of “tragedy.” The best of the fiction writers about the Partition are not concerned with merely telling stories of violence, but with making a profoundly troubled inquiry about the survival of our moral being in the midst of horror. (3119)

Bhalla calls attention to the effect that Partition violence had on the human psyche by exploring how communities made sense of the unprecedented chaos. He charges the writers of Partition literature to move beyond restating the acts of violence and explore the cost of survival. This focus on survival of violence is exemplified by the aid worker's intense focus on an abducted girl, even after she has disappeared from the scene. He inspects the room she occupied, examining it for insight into her behavior and identity.

The story is in fact an extended flashback, told from the perspective of the aid worker. His memory is triggered by soapsuds circling down the drain after a shower. The connection between his bath and the girl's washing of her face brings back memories:

As he rubbed his hair with the towel, his eyes fell on the drain. The water was flowing in the filthy drain clogged with scum. Suddenly, he remembered the incident that had affected his overly-sensitive mind with such force. For several days afterwards he had not been able to think of anything else. Then, gradually, everything had faded from his memory. But today, the sight of the thin trickle of water accompanied by soap suds brought back the memory of the incident with a jolt. (Mastur 1)

The girl lives on in the memory of the aid worker, despite everyday events that replace the shock of the moment. His mind returns to her and the incidents related to her abduction; his memory combines gender, experience, and trauma. This act of recounting a female abduction becomes a reconfiguring of the women who were taken from their families and communities. Mastur chooses to investigate abduction because of how it came to symbolize social and political transitions: "The figure of the abducted woman became symbolic of crossing borders, of violating social, cultural, and political boundaries" (Menon, "No Woman's Land" 20). The abducted woman was a lived metaphor for the ruptures in society. Her disappearance confirmed the loss of moral standards and civil behavior.

The aid worker confronts violence almost from the onset of the story. A cycle of retribution negates his appeals to civility and honorable behavior. His role in the story features a

double irony: he is an aid worker who becomes a surrogate protector for a young girl in an abandoned building. He is returning home from a day spent helping refugees:

That day he had combed the isolated nooks and crannies of the city for those affected by the riots and had succeeded in bringing fifty people to the refugee camp. It was the end of the day . . . Twelve or thirteen men stood at the edge of a street drain, peering into it. He came up to them. There was a lock on the front door of the building outside which they were standing. The men were planning to force the lock. (Mastur 1-2)

He pleads with the men before they enter the building, but his attempts cannot stop the force of the mob's anger. "But listen to me, this is not humane" he says. He tries to "shower drops of humanity on emotions that were aflame with the fire of vengeance. But he was cut off before he could complete his sentence." The group is determined to break the lock of the building's exterior door and find the person inside. They reject the aid worker's entreaty for humane action. For them, "humane" is empty of meaning, given the crimes they have witnessed against members of their own community. Vengeance dominates this scene and the mob's rhetoric focuses on retaliation: "When our sisters, mothers and brothers were being bathed in blood, where was humanity then, and where were you?" Several of the men spoke at the same time" (Mastur 2). Thus, the aid worker unsuccessfully confronts retaliatory violence.

In response to the narrator's entreaties, the men reveal a sense of violation, stemming from the violation of their families. Violence against family members is first typified by "sisters, mothers," the two pre-marital relationships that define women's status in society. The cries against these atrocities show the men's failure to maintain the honor of their families by protecting the women from desecration (Narasimhan-Madhavan 403). During the mass movement of people from one location to another, male protectors could no longer successfully guard female sexuality. No longer were fathers, brothers, or husbands able to preserve their female relatives from pollution from sexual assault or abduction. Women became instruments by

which each side could inflict harm on the other. Many women took their own lives or were killed by their families to avoid being dishonored (Menon, “No Woman’s Land” 31-64).

The men of the mob are angry at the violation of their families, manifested both in the loss of family members and the loss of sexual purity and familial honor. The question they put to the aid worker, “where was humanity and where were you?” implies the aid worker was a colluder in the previous violence against the local community. Despite the aid worker’s attempts to help refugees, the mob sees him as a man with an aggressive sexuality. In their reading, a man during an unstable time is likely to take advantage of chaos to enact his own desires. This suspicion of the roving male is confirmed by the mob’s indiscriminate pursuit of retribution. Violence affirms the power of the asserting group over those who are at its mercy; violence against women and the sexual pollution of women through rape allow men to mark the territory of the opposing side (Menon, “No Woman’s Land” 400). Without regard for specific individual blame, the mob prefers to exact their own punishment on members of the opposite community.

Unable to dissuade the men from breaking the lock and entering, the aid worker volunteers to enter the building first. When he does, his only thought is to warn the person inside to hide. That person remains genderless in the aid worker’s mind. His quickly formulated plan, however, dissolves when he encounters the building’s resident—a young girl, sitting quietly inside the empty building. The girl’s presence solidifies the aid worker’s protective instincts. He knows the danger she is in because he has witnessed violence against women in other parts of the city. His first glance at the girl confirms she is vulnerable: “A beautiful slender girl sat on the floor before him. Her nose was red, her eyelids were swollen, her eyes were filled with weariness and her body looked frail. Her long hair hung loose, and holding a comb in her hand she gazed with half-shut eyes at a mirror in front of her.” Stunned by the unexpected presence of a young girl, the aid

worker questions her incongruous presence: “He wasn’t sure if sitting before him was a real, flesh-and-blood person, or an enchanting spirit, a fairy” (Mastur 3). The ethereal nature of the girl dramatizes her presence in the midst of the encroaching mob. Her vulnerability before both the male aid worker and the mob brings to the fore the fine line between rescuer and abductor. The moment of discovery solidifies the girl’s position as an object between these two types of men.

As Sarvar V. Sherry Chand suggests, her vulnerability reveals paternalism’s dual modes of protection and violation. The aid worker assumes the role of male protector whose duty is to shield the female body. The mob, however, personifies patriarchal violence which seeks to violate the female body in response to communal dishonor. In both senses, the men act upon the female who is characterized as a “girl” because of her age and presumed sexual innocence. The men understand the girl through her silence; she is passive and waiting to be acted on. Chand’s analysis of gender in Partition literature points to the silent female voice in narratives about sexual violence. Women’s silence in these texts, Chand argues, is “emblematic of all the historical silences imposed on/around women and their experience of Partition” (2).

The female character in this story supports Chand’s analysis. From the point of discovery to abduction, the girl remains silent. She remains silent even when she engages her rescuer by gazing directly at him, an act that interrupts the overriding sense of passivity. She makes eye contact with the aid worker: “When the girl lifted her heavy-lidded eyes and looked at him and the comb fell from her hand, he became aware of her as a real person and his soul fluttered once again to rescue her” (Mastur 4). The aid worker assumes the role of protector. This role is bestowed upon him for two reasons: as a helper of refugees, and the fact that he represents older

masculine power in the presence of younger female vulnerability. That he “became aware of her as a real person” conflicts with his gendered desire “to rescue her.”

The girl’s vulnerability heightens the mob’s tendencies to enact the most extreme version of masculinity: exerting power over a submissive female. The enraged mob soon challenges the aid worker, who has assumed the role of protector. The mob barges into the room and the leader, a man with bloodshot eyes, proceeds to pick up the girl. The aid worker tries to protect her: “Have pity, don’t touch her!” Coming between the girl and the man with the bloodshot eyes, he screamed like a madman” (4). The mob is temporarily thwarted by the intrusion of another male standing between them and the girl. However, the mob members soon begin challenging each other to gauge who would be the most dominant in terms of masculinity. The idea of honor dependent upon female purity resurfaces: “Why? Will her body be soiled? We do all the work and he reaps the benefit. I say, go your way now.” One of the other men spoke derisively” (4). In the charged atmosphere, the mob rejects the aid worker as protector as well as the suggestion that the rescuer role is available to them if they do not harm the girl. Instead, they read the aid worker’s interference as evidence of his own sexual desire, a desire to possess the girl himself, rather than sharing her with many.

The aid worker’s role as protector is disrupted by the mob’s focus on vengeance mingled with sexual desire. His appeals for humanity and compassion fall on deaf ears:

“No... No!” He tried once again to put himself between the men and the girl, but the man with the bloodshot eyes placed his dagger on his chest. Then the man lifted the girl and threw her over his shoulders as if she were a lamb. The girl did not make a sound, she did not resist, but when the men turned to leave she stretched out her limp arms toward him. He wished that the dagger had pierced his chest at that very moment. (4)

In both Hindu and Muslim communities, ritual slaying of animals was central to religious observance. In her namelessness, youth, and assumed purity, the girl becomes a symbolic cleansing object for the mob incensed by the violence perpetrated on their community. For

example, the girl does not resist the mob; she succumbs to the masculine power play. Her position between the men is cemented by her age, gender, and lack of status. She is an innocent being led to the slaughter “as if she were a lamb.” In the absence of male family, her honor and body are no longer her own; she is co-opted as another item in communal reprisals.

Her silence denies her fear; she does not show distress or protest being taken. In her appeal to the aid worker, she uses only one gesture: she stretches her “limp arms toward him” as she is carried away. The aid worker reads this gesture as the movement of a child who wants to be lifted out of the arms of strangers and put back into the protective care she finds more familiar. This silent action, more so than if the girl had cried, screamed, or physically resisted, underlines her status as a possession in an engendered interplay of violence. Her childlike beseeching torments the aid worker because he is unable to protect. The girl’s silence in the face of the mob and the aid worker underlines her position between two power structures—protector and violator. The aid worker does not concede to the mob as wordlessly as the girl but instead repeatedly resists. In other words, he is allowed this voice only in the role of protector: “Agitated, he leapt toward her again, but was thrust back and the man with the bloodshot eyes wrapped the girl’s arms around his neck” (Mastur 4).

The mob leader is adamant about taking away the spoils of their discovery. The gesture of wrapping the girl’s arms around his neck represents a subverted paternal gesture. Unlike the aid worker, the mob does not want to protect this girl who continues to be characterized through her female sexuality. Instead, the mob leader signifies that the girl is now his possession and he can do with her whatever he wants. The narrative gives another glimpse of the girl’s reaction to her abduction: “As if in extreme pain, the girl shut her eyes.”² As a token of exchange in these

² Mastur, 4.

power dynamics between the two men, the girl is powerless. She is rendered a sexual object whose possession can alleviate the honor lost by a community that has witnessed violence against its female members.

Chand suggests that Partition narratives of violence share commonalities: men are actors, and women are recipients. These roles reinforce notions of patriarchal violence: “The seekers, doers, gazers, knowers – protectors, “owners” as well as violators – are men” (3). Although this story seems to confirm that Mastur’s intention is to acknowledge the trend of “the silenced woman [who] continues to be silenced,” the second half of the narrative demonstrates a clear break from this type of narrative (Chand 3). The second half becomes recuperative when the aid worker dwells on the abducted girl who is long gone. His musings and attempts to recreate her last days, thoughts, and motivations allow him a limited sense of recovery. In attempts to understand her, he looks past his role of protector and breaks the chivalric storyline into a realistic present. He remains in the room after her abduction and begins interpreting her presence there as a person. This act reinstates her as a visible character. This behavior is tied to the aid worker’s empathy for the individual. It is significant that he failed to experience empathy during previous violence in the city. This empathy thus marks a beginning in the aid worker’s psychological recovery. His recovered self allows him to experience the girl’s final few days rather than assume the telling of her experiences in a masculinized voice. She penetrates the scenes of communal violence in her specificity:

He had failed to reach out and hold her outstretched arms. He burst into tears like a child. ... He had seen women being abducted, he had heard the cries and laments of so many women, and no one had ever touched his heart. But this girl, with her outstretched arms, had left such a mark – it was as if she had pinched and twisted the soft flesh of his heart. (Mastur 4-5)

The aid worker admits he was previously unmoved by the horrible plight of other women in the city. This admission reveals his ambivalent position in the community prior to helping the

survivors of violence. He admits that the scale of violence against women in the city inured him and made him unable to respond emotionally.

The personal encounter with a helpless girl is a turning point for the aid worker. He feels the desperation of powerlessness and the lack of agency felt by the victims. Guilt at his own powerlessness and failure as a rescuer makes him similar to the girl. He begins to explore her behavior and actions prior to her discovery as a means of understanding her motives: “[S]he sat down to comb her hair. But why was she combing her hair? Why did she wash her face with soap? If she was tired she could have just splashed water on her face, but she had actually washed her face with soap and water. And she was engrossed in adorning herself” (Mastur 5).³ Although the aid worker’s underlying grief mirrors that of the girl, the two characters differ in terms of suffering. The aid worker will likely not be exposed to sexual abuse, but now has a lasting understanding of his limited power in the dominant structure. His memory of the girl’s abduction haunts him and cannot be easily forgotten. In this sense, he becomes a witness to her life, and her implied death. His repeated traumatic memories are the essence of Partition narratives, that is, narration at an intimate and individual level. He staggers from the discovery that the abducted girl was waiting for her lover.

The girl’s unseen lover is the second male figure whose connection to her is broken by the mob. He is revealed only through a note discovered by the aid worker: “I’ll be coming to you soon. I’m yearning to see you, my longing is so great that even if a terrible storm stands in my way it will not be able to prevent me from reaching you – I will come straight to your room, where, adorned and beautiful, you will be waiting for me and –.” (Mastur 5). The note’s writer, using the florid language of love notes, says nothing will keep him from her, not even “a terrible

³ Ibid, 5.

storm.” At the time the letter was written, the writer could not have gauged the extent of the communal violence that was to ensue. Like many impassioned lovers, he did not realize that many things could prevent reunion with his sweetheart. The irony is that the star-crossed lovers are separated not by dissenting parents, but by a factious community.

Although specifically stated in the narrative, it is possible that the lover has been detained due to panic in the city, or that he is also the victim of violence and is injured or dead. The girl, however, keeps the note in hope and expects to be reunited with her beloved. Her adornment is an assertion of sexuality and her active participation in choosing a partner. In the act of adorning herself while waiting for her lover, she asserts her willingness to move from child to woman. She has chosen whom she intends to share her emotions, and presumably, her body. She actively makes a choice despite the loss of family and the chaos in her community. Her lover’s failure to make good on his promise to come and take her away ensures that the girl is still present in the building and exposed to the roving mob. Mastur provides a surrogate in the character of the male aid worker, but even the aid worker’s attempts to protect her are overwhelmed by the strength and number of the mob. The girl’s agency is threatened when the padlock is broken in that she is no longer considered an individual with autonomous desires. Once the mob sees her, she becomes a sexed object the men argue over. Her abduction is a warning about the limits of protectionist ideals during moments of violent social upheaval.

The title of the story is a play on a well-known line from the popular Punjabi poem “Here Ranjha” by Syed Waris Shah. The poem is but one rendering of a familiar folktale about the separation of a young woman from her lover Ranjha. The two lovers, Heere and Ranjha, are parted for life. However, their love continues despite separation. Heere is poisoned by her family for refusing to be an honorable wife; her inability to deny her love for Ranjha marks her as

improper. Ranjha dies immediately upon hearing the news of his beloved's death. In Shah's version of the tale Heere cries out the famous line, "They are taking me away, Father, they are taking me away." She yells these words as her bridal palanquin leaves the courtyard of her family home. Mastur's use of this line as the title of her story is an ominous reference to the doomed romance between the female character and her unseen lover. Mastur's literary allusion to the tragic love story of Heere and Ranjha doubles back; the two lovers in her story will not be reunited. The abduction of this female character is a literary rendition of the historical fact that thousands of women were abducted during the chaos of Partition. The creation of India and Pakistan involved an undeclared war on women of all communities. They were "rendered faceless, undifferentiated, suspect and haunted" (Pandey 135). As Anjali Bhardwaj Datta asserts, women's bodies were spatial territories upon which the men of opposing communities contested social and religious identities: "Amidst communal turmoil women were targeted as the chief victims of humiliation at the hands of men of rival communities. Many witnessed loss of homes, murders, lootings and abuses, and were victims of rape. There were those who were abducted, forcibly converted or married. Innumerable women were separated from their families" (2232).

In "They Are Taking Me Away, Father, They Are Taking Me Away," Mastur presents a singular narrative which cycles back through the male character's recollections of a female abduction. His experience of this unknown girl's abduction marks him in two ways: he is a witness to the engendered nature of violence during this period, and he is exposed to his own position of powerlessness before the mob. The lack of referential information in this story, the absence of all religious or local signifiers, is a deliberate move on Mastur's part. She omits this information in order to show the universal nature of individuals who attempted to prevent abductions.

Her story, “The Miscreant” is not as subtle in its exploration of the violence related to Partition. She clearly defines the environment and religious identities of the characters. . She uses religious identity to reveal how members of opposing religious groups are manipulated by local authorities who move to consolidate power.

Caught Between the Communal and the Familial: “His Only Sister, His Treasure”

In “The Miscreant,” Mastur recreates life in a pre-Partition village, capturing the peaceful co-existence among Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. She then shows the dehumanizing effects that violence has on this once peaceful community. Her literary intervention goes beyond recapturing images of graphic violence: she investigates attitudes towards women’s sexuality and the pure female body that must be guarded at all costs. Fazlu, a male character in “The Miscreant,” witnesses a woman’s abduction and then transforms into a perpetrator of violence. He begins as a protector but ends up a raping murderer. His transformation is motivated by the alleged abduction of his sister and his imagining her humiliation.

Mastur offers a stinging condemnation of the politics of violence during the creation of Pakistan. The story traces life in an unnamed village in an area soon to become Pakistan. The landlord of this village manipulates the main character, Fazlu, into committing acts of violence against Hindu villagers. The manipulation of Fazlu is evident in the ironic declaration that he sees himself as a protector of all non-Muslims who live in the village. However, he becomes mired in the violence when the landlord misinforms him that his sister had been abducted by a Hindu family. In retaliation, he commits violence against the same Hindu villagers he had always considered an extension of his own family. His betrayal of a Hindu girl makes him another example of the senseless violence among people who once lived in the same community. Fazlu eventually discovers that he was manipulated into committing violent acts. When he sees his sister healthy and unharmed, he is overwhelmed by regret and despair. His idealistic vision of

a multi-ethnic village life is crushed as he realizes that he played a key role in its dissolution. His name is put on the list of “miscreants” who committed violence during the turbulent transition into nationhood.

Fazlu’s idealism and his pro-secular stance that the new Pakistan will be a home for everyone, Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu, places him in opposition to the traditionalists in the village. He is respected by the villagers and, as an outspoken young man from the farming class, challenges the established authority of the wealthy landowners. Fazlu’s public and vocal protection of the non-Muslim members of the village is an assertion of authority and power, exceeding his status as a farmer. In addition to foregrounding socio-economic issues, the story examines the challenges of creating a Pakistan. Mastur paints a vivid picture of the rumors and fears that circulated in the period leading up to the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan. The birth of Pakistan occurs amid Muslim fear and anxiety of non-Muslim residents of what was to become Pakistani territory.

Hindu and Sikh villagers lived next door to Muslims in the fictional village depicted by Mastur. Such a co-existence was also common in many locales in the pre-Partition period. What is significant about this community, however, is that the reading of the newspaper becomes a technique the *zamindar* and his son use to draw illiterate villagers into national events and to instill fear in the minority members of the village: “these educated landlords and their grandsons had repented their sins and not only begun reading the newspapers to the uneducated folk, they had also started making speeches” (Mastur 9).⁴ Although violence has not reached this particular village, news of the riots elsewhere permeates daily life through the newspaper.

⁴The zamindar system under British rule was used to collect taxes on behalf of the colonial government. Titles were often hereditary and *zamindars* functioned as local landlords. The title

Historian Gyanendra Pandey explains the role of newspapers in spreading of fear during Partition. He states that many initial reports of riots were “marked by the signature of rumour,” using excessive numbers. Pandey cites more than one newspaper account that used “rounded-off figures” for the number of wounded, murdered, or abducted. He identifies these accounts as “*precise and yet extravagant*” there was precision in identifying the nature of the incidents but extravagance in reporting the numbers of people involved. This increased the sense of foreboding in the areas where violence had not yet begun. Mastur describes the feelings of fear and unrest in Fazlu’s village: “[S]uddenly news of Hindu-Muslim riots in Bihar, Nawakhali and Calcutta began pouring in. So many hundred Muslims have been martyred by the Hindus and so many hundred Hindus have been killed by the Muslims. The riots became a topic of discussion” (Pandey 70-71).

Fazlu opposes the reading of the newspaper because reports of violence make the Hindu and Sikh villagers suspicious of each other. He hopes to protect the village by isolating it from the grim realities surrounding it. Fazlu is dedicated to the task of communal harmony He even undertakes an all-night watch to keep his non-Muslim friends safe. In the quest to keep the village intact, Fazlu seeks to preserve a way of life outside the realm of politics. He holds on to the idea of a place where villagers of different faiths are part of an extended family. His vision of a modern tolerant state is frustrated by the political wrangling of the landlord and his supporters. The landlord undermines Fazlu’s loyalty to the villagers by playing on his allegiance to his sister: “I was waiting for you. Fazlu, the news is very bad. When I returned I found out that Devi Deval’s family slipped away at midnight, and the terrible tragedy is that they abducted your sister and took her with them” (18). Told that his sister was in danger, Fazlu becomes part of the

has been translated by Naqvi as ‘landlord’ elsewhere in the story. Mastur’s use of this word identifies the locale of this village as situated in the area designated as Pakistan

entrenched religious conflict. As the guardian of his sister's honor, he adopts a pro-Muslim stance in opposition to his Hindu neighbors. He had not previously considered her vulnerability as a Muslim woman while he was out resisting rumors of unrest and vowing to protect his fellow Hindu and Sikh villagers. Gradually, it dawns on him that the national conflict is becoming local: "*Zamindar ji...*" Fazlu stared at him like a madman. "This is a lie, they cannot take my sister, no one can take my sister" (Mastur 18). Fazlu's role as the protector of his sister's honor is founded on his identity as her sole male relative. As the senselessness of her alleged abduction pierces his conscience, he starts to consider his obligations:

The six-foot tall Fazlu crumpled to his feet. His only sister, his treasure. She was four when their parents died and Fazlu was the one who raised her. He had suffered a great deal of hardship for her sake, stumbled so many times. That was the sister who had been snatched from him. And snatched by the people for whom he had given up his sleeping and waking hours, for whom he had put his own safety aside. (18)

Fazlu's dedication to non-Muslim villagers crumbles when he thinks they have betrayed him by abducting his sister. He assumes that the very crimes he attempted to protect them from have been perpetrated against him. His obligations to his sister and his love for his neighbors compete. Anger at this unexpected violation triumphs. He does not question the landowner's story. He relives his sister's horror through the stories of other women's suffering and is thus propelled into even greater rage: "Begma, my sister!" he screamed again with ferocity and then he pulled at his hair. In the dimmed light he could clearly see his sister walking in the midst of a crowd of naked women, drops of blood dripping from her face and her body" (18).

The leap to revenge is almost instantaneous as Fazlu rehearses his sister's shame and exposure. A formerly friendly, kind, and non-partisan Fazlu is transformed into a raging man with a dagger. Mastur illustrates the ease of such a transformation. In Fazlu's instance, the rhetoric of retribution means immediate action: "I will not spare even one of them, I'll kill them all!" Swiftly he opened a trunk of clothes and pulled out a long, shiny dagger from under the

clothes. As he ran his finger along the blade of the dagger a few drops of blood fell to the floor and were absorbed into the mud. He kissed the dagger and ran. His enraged friends followed him” (19). Fazlu breaks into his neighbor’s home and becomes the Muslim marauder that the family has feared since the first reports of religious violence. Instead of protecting them, he embodies the very thing they feared. Their protector becomes their violator.

Fazlu personifies both patriarchal protection and violation. While in “They Are Taking Me Away, Father, They Are Taking Me Away” these two aspects are personified by the aid worker and the mob, here Mastur places these roles and emotions inside a single character. In doing so, she explores how easily the transition from protector to violator can occur. Fazlu’s initial rage is not sufficient to propel him towards murder. He must repeatedly rehearse his sister’s suffering and infuse her body with insult and sexual degradation. Faced with the familiarity the Hindu house, Fazlu must call up rage so he can do what was previously unthinkable:

First he entered *Chachi*’s house. Chachi and the girl Fazlu called his sister were asleep. Chacha, however, was awake and sat on his bed as though guarding them. ... For a moment Fazlu’s raised hand halted in mid-air, but in the very next instant his lamenting sister appeared before his eyes. She was naked. There was blood dripping from her lips. (20)

Imagining Begma’s imagined humiliation propels Fazlu toward retaliation. He does not think twice about murdering a man he called uncle. The language of the story highlights Fazlu’s haste to violate an innocent woman as well as his manic state: “After finishing with *Chacha*, Fazlu rapes and murders a “girl he called his sister.”⁵: “He ripped off her clothes. He chewed her lips with his teeth. He trampled her body mercilessly and then he hacked her body into pieces and hurled the pieces into the street” (20).

⁵ Ibid.

Begma's body becomes a secondary site onto which Fazlu inscribes rage in the wake his Muslim sister's rape and humiliation. In contrast, the Hindu woman he had come to regard as a sister, —an actual victim of violence--becomes a rough sketch of violated form. Her clothes, lips, and body are incinerated in Fazlu's vengeance. She is completely overwritten by his anger and, as such, becomes a prototype for female victims caught in the rhetoric of retaliatory violence. Fazlu's violent acts exemplify how women became gendered communal boundary markers in this time of political and social upheaval. As Jisha Menon points out, during Partition abuses against women were incessant and numerous: "[T]he violence between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs was enacted upon the bodies of women of all three communities. ... The multiple forms of sexual violence included inscribing tattoos on their bodies, parading them naked in sacred spaces like temples, mosques, gurudwaras and cutting their breasts off" (29-37). Fazlu's unimaginable crimes are sanctioned every time he has a refreshed sense of rage at his sister's defilement.

Yet, crime does not soothe Fazlu. Even after killing a Hindu father and raping a Hindu daughter, he continues to be haunted by images Begma's debasement:

Afterward the sound of screams could be heard all night ... His eyes were like raw meat, his hair was disheveled, his mind completely numb. He was standing motionless on the street leading to the mosque as if he had no home, no place to go. Tears flowed unchecked from his eyes... All he could see was the crowd of naked women with his sister in the front. (20)

The difference between the use of imagined action in this story and the use of imagined action in "They Are Taking Me Away, Father, They Are Taking Me Away" is considerable. In the former story, Fazlu's imagines his sister's future as an abused woman and clouds his judgment with disastrous consequences. In contrast, the aid worker in "They are Taking me Away Father," stays in an abandoned room in an effort to determine what the girl may have been doing in the hours preceding her abduction. Unlike Fazlu, the aid worker does not allow his imagination to run wild into blind rage. For one character, an alleged abduction of his sister provokes a chain of

imagined humiliations; for the other, being present to witness the abduction of stranger represents the culmination of powerlessness.

This difference in how two characters remember an abducted female can be attributed to the relationship between the female and her male protector. In “The Miscreant,” Mastur explores how the role of “chief defendant of Muslim female honor” is imposed on a male family member above all other social bonds. The aid worker in “They Are Taking Me Away, Father, They Are Taking Me Away” is not a male relative of the abducted girl. Therefore, while he laments her loss he is not bound to exact retribution, nor is he tormented by visions of her abuse. In contrast, Fazlu, as Begma’s only male relative, has to play the role of defender.

Mastur deploys Fazlu’s murderous rage to mirror the state of mind of the mob in “They Are Taking Me Away Father, They Are Taking Me Away.” His transformation from community egalitarian to murderous rapist mimics the logic employed by the mob when confronted by the aid worker. Because of the possibility that his sister was “bathed in blood,” Fazlu will not be dissuaded from killing his dearest neighbors. His response is an echo of the mob’s words when rejecting the aid workers pleas that they no harm an innocent girl. Fazlu may well have become a member of a roving mob had his sister not returned unharmed. He is flummoxed to learn that Begma is as unblemished as when he last saw her: “Begma *behan!*” A friend of Fazlu’s who was sitting near him screamed loudly and then, picking up his turban, ran outside. Fazlu could not believe his eyes. But his widowed aunt, *Masi*, was with her too. He jumped up and clasped his sister in his arms” (21). With Begma’s reappearance, anger evaporates and is replaced by astonishment: “Then he began touching her as if to make sure she wasn’t a clay image. But the clay image was talking” (21). Fazlu’s touching Begma refracts the violence against the neighbor’s daughter. His touch confirms that his sister is alive. These touches substitute for the

illicit touches he imagined took place when he thought his sister was being violated. These imagined violations that fueled vengeance are now gone. When the sister he thought was lost is returned, Fazlu is speechless. Begma explains her absence in the wake of widespread communal panic:

I was awake all night, there were sounds of such screaming, it was terrifying. No one knows what happened. ... you were working, I would have died if I had been here by myself. *Masi* came last night, she was so worried and she said, "Come with me, there's going to be trouble in the village and there's a Hindu family right next door—who knows when Fazlu will return. (21)

From Begma's speech, the reader learns that rumors of violence, particularly against women, troubled her as much as they did her brother. She seeks shelter from the predicted unrest with other members of her family. She had feared for her brother's life during the long night: "I was just worried about you *Bhayya*, I though, God forbid..." She began kissing his arm wildly" (21) Through dramatic irony, Mastur highlights Begma's inability to comprehend the fact that her brother was in fact perpetrating violence against the Hindu family she feared may harm them. The specter of violence takes hold of the village until no one is certain of who is friend and who is foe. The normally loving and close relationship between brother and sister has been distorted in the context of sexualized violence against women. Fazlu's love for Begma becomes a liability when her safety is allegedly threatened.

Beyond the question of personal or familial safety, Mastur explores deception and manipulation during social unrest. She depicts instances in which some groups benefited from the rampant dissolution of social ties. For example, in "The Miscreant," the Muslim landowner manipulates the context of unrest in order to serve his own ambitions. He does this by spreading the false rumor that Begma had been kidnapped. Fazlu learns of this deceit from his aunt's account of the previous evening's events:

“Yes Fazlu, ... the *zamindar*’s man came and he said there’s trouble in the village, Fazlu will be working all night, and you go and get his sister, the Hindus are right next door, who knows what can happen, I’m only concerned with your well-being, and she’s our sister too, isn’t she. ... “May God forgive us, what kind of screams were these Fazlu, how did all this happen?” The old woman sat down on the bed. (21)

Beyond disclosing the landowner deceit, the aunt also reveals her unwitting participation in Fazlu’s destruction. The phrase “the Hindus are right next door, who know what can happen” is reiterated as she explains how she had taken Begma to her home for the evening. It is ironic that both women express concern for Fazlu. Without realizing it, the two inquire with great concern on the welfare of a rapist and murderer. The aunt’s question “what kind of screams were these, Fazlu, how did all this happen?” becomes a rhetorical question that imprints the reality of the last few hours on Fazlu. The sister and aunt wait for Fazlu’s response and hear his admission of the incomprehensible:

Pushing Begma aside, he fell on the bed with a thud and began sobbing uncontrollably like a child. “Killed everyone...killed everyone...O *Zamindar ji*...the girl I called sister...” Fazlu bit down on his lips. The old woman was looking at him in surprise while Begma, clinging to her brother’s arm, wept. (21)

Fazlu’s tearful remorse is the only permitted form of regret; he is prevented from speaking out against the landlord because of the latter’s power in the community. At the same time, however, Fazlu and his sister are protected from retaliation since they are Muslims within the borders of what will soon become Pakistan, Hindus and Sikhs leave the village after word of the killings spreads. It is significant that the landlord takes over the money and goods of the murdered Hindu family. He seems to have orchestrated the entire plan in order to enrich himself.

For the second time, Fazlu is trapped in the role of brother. Because he remains responsible for his sister, he is unable to punish the landowner’s deliberate manipulation:

Fazlu could not get even with the landlord because he made his living by working in his fields. He wanted to marry off his sister, it was the landlord’s land that was helping him prepare his sister’s dowry, it was this land that had enabled him to take care of his sister after their parents death; how could he get even with the *zamindar*? How could he abandon

his sister, the sister for whom he had spilled the blood of his loved ones and taken on in return a lifetime of pain and agony for himself? (22)

Fazlu's violent acts bind him to Begma more closely as they face the harsh reality of socio-economic dependence on the landowner. He needs the landlord to make sure he can properly carry out his role as brother and protector. His role as the male figure in Begma's binds him to her, to the land, and to the landowner. Fazlu hides his crime and attempts to soothe himself in Begma's company. He is relieved that she is safe: "The empty houses of *Chacha* Baldev, *Dada* Sardar Singh, and their companions seemed to cut right through to his heart. Distraught and anguished, he returned home and tried to clam himself by engaging in idle chatter with Begma." But his punishment and humiliation are not over. As he soon discovers, the landlord's scheming and treachery continue to undermine him:

"Yes, Fazlu *sahib*, I heard that you wiped them all out in the middle of the night. We were asleep, we didn't even know what happened." The *thanedar*⁶ laughed raucously again. "*Zamindar ji* has informed us that you are responsible for the all this unrest." He turned to his clerk, "Put this worthless bastard's name down on the list of miscreants." The *thanedar* burst into another laugh and gave the bewildered, wide-eyed Fazlu a smack on the head. (23)

Fazlu's is unable to realize the vision of a multi-ethnic Pakistan because of his own gendered and socio-economic position in the village. His classification as a miscreant erases everything but the violent acts he committed.

Mastur is not suggesting that each violent act during Partition was the result of manipulation. But she shows how ordinary citizens rationalized the most abhorrent behaviors against their former neighbors and trusted friends. Begma's rumored abduction is the backdrop against which gender, religion, and ideals struggle for dominance in Fazlu's mind. This imagined

⁶ The policeman responsible for the local jail; Mastur is again using a pre-Partition term to signify this locale as designated to become part of the new Pakistan. Her use of these locale terms makes this story far more specific than either of the other two stories in this chapter.

abduction, the Hindu girl's death and rape, and the actual abduction of the girl in "They Are Taking Me Away, Father, They Are Taking Me Away," show Mastur's willingness to explore diverse representations of women's experiences during the violence of Partition. Her stories address the silences, gaps, and contradictions of violence in settings where the victims and assailants had previously lived in relative harmony (Dill 5).

Mastur uses historical references, such as the figure of the abducted woman, in an effort to understand the consequences of repeated acts of violence for both women and men. As David Gilmartin acknowledges, a historical event on the scale of the Partition "dramatizes ... the tension between the idea of an "objective" narrative history centered on the state and the multiple identities and narratives constructed on the margins" (1070). Mastur's work explores historical instances of abduction and sexual violation in unconventional terms. She examines the underlying assumptions of paternalistic gender roles where women's bodies represent familial honor and men are assigned the role of protector. At this particular historical moment, the female body, as the repository of honor and the boundary marker of religious communities, was subject to horrific violence. Culturally reinforced binary stereotypes had positioned men as the protectors and women as the protected, or men as the violators and women as the violated.

Mastur's stories address the vulnerable position of women during this period of political and social instability. She particularizes well-known historical facts in order to raise the issue of the disempowerment of women even after the end of the violence. The focus is on individuals who must choose between traditional attitudes towards impure women and empathy for their suffering. By focusing on the particular, Mastur augments the facts of the Partition with the emotions of the personal. She moves away from the overwhelming number of victims towards understanding the intersections of gender, sexuality, and violence in the relationships among

individual citizens. As such, these types of stories occupy a particular space as Partition narratives.

The two Partition narratives used by Mastur demonstrate her purposeful choices in revealing or withholding particular details in each story. She deliberately chooses the spatial or time indicators used in each story. She uses these indicators to either confirm certain aspects of the historical record or hide them. In “They are Taking Me Away, Father, They Are Taking Me Away” and “The Miscreant,” many of the female characters are excised from the text through death. Mastur shows that sexist attitudes towards women’s sexuality set an unattainable double standard not only for female victims during the Partition, but also in the lives many other women tried to create afterward. She demonstrates this sexist ideology by telling the stories from the male point of view. She thereby outlines men’s complicity in creating limiting choices for both men and women. Male faithfulness to tradition ruins the women in each story. The female characters embody cultural values even during moments of extraordinary social upheaval or exceptional circumstances.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This project has incorporated various authors who share a common interest in addressing the casual effects of masculine privilege within patriarchal family life across various nations. This examination interrogates the question of domestic space, the positioning of public and private selves of women, and the ways these differences are examined in the short stories of Ismat Chughtai, Assia Djebar, and Khadija Mastur.

By comparing these texts, we have seen how different writers within a larger geopolitical framework reconceive, rewrite, and manipulate conceptions of women as passive, static subjects, best protected by family interests within the home. The fictitious lens turns towards women's spaces; each writer addresses the asymmetrical power relationships between women, men, and the social constrictions controlling women's behavior. Each writer, however, writes in the context of different Muslim societies. These short stories focus on the looks, glances, and stares by female characters from within their homes. It is these actions that reveal the interior life of the family. They offer a reversal of the dominant public masculine gaze of Muslim society. Each writer also contests the restrictions placed on women's lives, including the narrow interpretation of women's roles which are enforced through "a series of social sanctions which have limited her role principally to that of mother and wife and for all practical purposes denied her freedom to choose a role or a combination of roles" (Azim 15). Chughtai, Djebar, and Mastur tackle the culturally oppressive centrality ascribed to the family and home in women's daily lives in Indian and Algerian Muslim communities.

These authors reject the traditional assigning of women's roles as virtuous, asexual wives and mothers. They appropriate notions of proper womanly behavior to construct a familiar scene of domestic life within the familial household. They then, however, uncover a complex and

competing arrangement of relationships inside the traditional structures of marriage and family. These authors subvert the domestic narrative, used by nationalists to define women's permitted parameters, to tell alternative versions of stories of the home, foregrounding women's experiences. These narratives challenge an assertion of a collective community that is made up of immediate family members and, in many cases, also encompasses extended family and relatives who do not favor the individual. Their stories illuminate the process Susan Mendus describes: "women are forced into marriage, not by laws merely, but by the very structure of society itself. Moreover, this societal pressure demands that women become, not simply slaves, but *willing slaves*" (36). Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur illuminate the richness of women's experiences in their daily lives despite the ever-present strictures for acceptable behavior.

All three use women's bodies, voices, and sexuality to contest representations of power and the discourse of womanhood dominating the lives of Muslim women in their respective contexts. Their texts show the creativity with which many women were able to resist the weight of familial pressure that policed women's bodies and behavior in order to achieve a measure of autonomy within the dominant structure. Control of the female body became emblematic of the nationalist tendency to invent an allegory for women within the various historical contexts of this study. In colonial India, Muslim women were both entrusted as the guardians of culture, and instructed as the weaker members of the faith. In revolutionary Algeria, women were expected to celebrate the selfless female warrior and ignore questions of what life in the liberated Algeria would be like for female citizens. In the creation of Pakistan and the ensuing violence, women became the faceless victims of sexual violence, as Hindu and Muslim communities retaliated to avenge their honor. In each of these instances, control of the female body as it related to marital practices and social convention figured prominently in how male thinkers conceptualized, wrote,

and dealt with women. As Peter Van Der Veer explains, “Nationalism is a selective, homogenizing discourse that tends to demarcate social boundaries sharply and to narrow down the diversity and ambiguity of everyday life” (105). Assia Djébar also addressed the limits of nationalist projects in regards to women’s issues: “For a few decades—as each nationalism triumphs here and there—we have been able to realize that, within this Orient that has been delivered unto itself, the image of woman is still perceived no differently, be it by the father, by the husband, and, more troublesome still, by the brother and son” (110).

The works of Ismat Chughtai, Assia Djébar, and Khadija Mastur acknowledge alternatives to traditional images of women as the mother-wife. They show how the maternal, domestic, and sexual elements of a woman’s private life encompass her position within the home and prescribe her role in society. For these writers, the act of writing becomes a means of intervening in public spaces, allowing each of them to respond to nationalist themed male discourse on women. Fiction emerges as a discursive perch from where Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur participate in specific and localized critiques of the power, violence, and violation of women’s bodies that occurred in their socio-cultural contexts. Narrative is the vocal strategy with which they “express and repair the schism between body and voice that results from colonial, patriarchal discourses that silence women.”¹ The visibility, agency, and consciousness of their female characters contradict the image of the Muslim woman as a passive subject of the “tripart tyranny of colonial, [indigenous] patriarchy and religion” (Saliba and Majaj xix). In various short stories, each author exposes instability within the traditional home by depicting desiring female subjects who are varyingly successful. The movement inward, toward life inside the home, ruptured the pattern of male created central narratives where public life was the focus of story telling. There is

¹ Therese Saliba, and Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman. *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2002. xix.

inter-textual contestation, reclamation, and reinvention by which these writers demonstrate efforts to respond to and grapple with socio-political change through literary texts.

Thematic Intersections

Particularly interesting are the intersections between conceptions of the home as a national ideology and the home as culturally configured in Muslim tradition. Contrary to a binary dichotomy of space, where males are equated with the public and females with the private, the work of these writers furthers the understanding of home as a site of complicated socio-cultural politics. In their writing they show how issues previously reserved for the public sphere are also present within the private sphere. Home becomes the space where femininity is constructed, managed, and preformed through the use of physical space by family members. The art of fiction gives these writers the opportunity to reclaim their own experiences outside the limited male-dominated views of Muslim women's identities. The authors can re-conceive perception from a more feminine perspective. The home exists both as a site for cultural construction of the Muslim family and also as a physical space for the enactment of the female Muslim identity. The home is a site where gendered expectations of social hierarchies are confirmed by members of the family.

Each author is interested in the contrasting ways everyday lives refuted dominant narratives constructed mostly by men. Djébar, Mastur, and Chughtai fought the collectivizing tendency of Islamic societies by creating a personal space for women and men. The blanks or exclusions of women's stories from colonial documents, as well as the nationalist project, highlights the need for fiction to fill in the blanks—the need to expose the narrative voices of the women themselves. Anne Donadey touches on this subject when she configures postcolonial women's writing: “[such writing] reclaims a history written by the conqueror” (143). Donadey defines postcolonial feminist literature as that literature which “foregrounds the presence and

voice of women silenced by a history that discounts them and fails to consider their agency” (143).

Chughtai, Djébar, and Mastur’s use of fictional narratives against the backdrop of nationalist movements shows the possibilities for a variety of understanding within one specific geopolitical setting. The writings of these authors highlight the different ways women use texts to negotiate space between the masculine hegemonies of the colonizer and the native patriarchy. They demonstrate very different and distinct literary viewpoints of nation, home, and women’s experiences within these constraints. The focus is not on uncovering the material and ideological specificities that constitute a group of women as “powerless” (Mohanty 34). Instead, this analysis reveals how control of women’s mobility and sexuality challenged national and ethnic conceptions of social orders. These texts demonstrate how the maternal, domestic, and sexual elements of a woman’s private life engendered her position within Muslim society.

Chughtai depicts misbehaving husbands and wives in order to reveal gaps in behavior in the middle class Muslim household. Assia Djébar reclaims the period of the revolution for non-combatant women whose experiences were outside the nation’s lens during the turbulent years of the resistance. Khadija Mastur contrasts the role of rescuer and avenger and thus demonstrates how the violence of the Partition of India disempowered men as well as women. Each makes significant contributions to her particular social context, and yet there are many overlapping themes and concerns among these texts. In choosing these particular authors, I have endeavored to showcase the fluidity of literature as a response to the intersections of gender, race, and nation. These writers call into question the logic of containing women, of enforcing so-called protective measures that keep women inside the home. By showing the dire effects on women’s emotional

lives that result from various enforced circumscribed lifestyles , they make powerful arguments for the overturning of sexist social practices families use to police their female members.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Madras, India, Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar moved to Hamilton, Canada, with her family at the age of four. Since that first journey, traveling became a consistent part of her life. Settling in Gainesville, Florida, for middle school and high school, Mohana graduated from Peace College in Raleigh, North Carolina, for a Bachelor of Arts in English and psychology in 2000. She then completed a Master of Arts in English literature at North Carolina State University, also in Raleigh, in 2002. She then returned to Gainesville to begin a Ph.D. in English literature. Throughout her academic career Mohana has maintained an interest in the co-curricular aspects of university life and served as a student affairs professional at various institutions including Peace College, the University of Florida, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown, and most recently, Qatar University in Doha, Qatar. She believes an ideal student experience occurs when faculty and staff work together for the holistic development of students. Upon completing her Ph.D., Mohana will return to Qatar, where she has been living with her husband for nearly three years, and works as an educational consultant for the national university, advising the administration of programs and services, which will meet international standards. Living in the Middle East has made the themes of her doctoral research project more concrete and immediate.