Representations of Motherhood by Female Ethnic Minority Novelists in Britain

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the representation of migrant motherhood from the perspective of the mother in novels by British ethnic minority writers. In this thesis, Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*, Preethi Nair's *One Hundred Shades of White*, and Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* are examined as novels that belong to the burgeoning literary terrain which reclaims the often repressed and marginalised maternal voice and narrative. Examining these texts, I draw on concepts from various feminist and postcolonial theorists to illuminate the texts' engagement with stereotypes about migrant mothers of "Third World" heritage, specifically their hegemonic view as victims and/or agents of patriarchy. This study investigates how migrant writers unsettle longstanding stereotypes about migrant and "Third World" mothers.

In this research, I argue that the texts' accentuation of maternal perspectives in narrating migrant subjectivities reveals complex journeys of (un)belonging which subvert assimilationist tones that characterise certain works by migrant writers. Portraying a complex migration process, which generally entails an intricate attachment to the country of origin/heritage, problematises reductionist representations of "Third World" countries and traditions and their role in the mothers' achievement of subjectivity and agency. Approaching these novels, I focus on the writers' interrogation of tropes that are usually associated with "Third World" women's oppression. I argue that the nuanced mothering experiences that three texts present challenge patriarchal constructions of motherhood and certain feminist writers' imaginations of migrant mothers as passive victims of patriarchy.

This study contributes to the growing interest, both in feminist theories and literature, in reclaiming the maternal voice. This thesis focuses on revealing the three texts' representation of complex/ambivalent mothering adds nuance to the compelling body of

studies in literary criticism and in feminist scholarship that are concerned with the study of migrant motherhood in ways that are challenging to reductionist representations and readings.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Mama, Papa, Noura, and Nadjiba,

without your constant prayers and unconditional love I would not have completed this PhD.

Introduction

This thesis is a study of the representation of motherhood in three migrant novels: *The Translator* by Leila Aboulela (1999), *One Hundred Shades of White* by Preethi Nair (2003), and *A Golden Age* by Tahmima Anam (2007). It discusses the ways in which these three texts construct images of motherhood that neither idealise nor reject it. The study focuses on the examination of the mother figure in each of the novels–Sammar, Nalini, and Rehana–and their complex maternal and migratory experiences. Since the novels are written by novelists of "Third World" origin/heritage, I analyse the texts' subversion of simplistic representations and stereotypical discourses about mothers–and by extension women–from the so-called "Third World"[1]. Women from the "Third World" have, for a long time, from the imperial period onwards, been quite often reduced to the one-dimensional image of the mother or woman who is victim of patriarchal cultures, passive, traditional and self-sacrificial. It is not uncommon for these descriptions to carry a negative association within them. This stereotypical image that is unrepresentative of the complexities that characterise the lives and

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[1] I am aware of the controversial nature of the term Third World. However, the rationale behind my use of this term, despite the negative and generalising implications that it evokes, is aligned with the arguments brought forward by scholars like Ella Shohat, and Lisa Suhair Majaja and Amal Amireh regarding this label. Shohat explains, "'Third World' usefully evokes structural commonalities of struggle. The invocation of the 'Third World' implies a belief that the shared history of (neo)colonialism and internal racism form sufficient common ground for alliances among such diverse people. If one does not believe or envision such commonalities, then the term 'Third World' should indeed be discarded" (247). Correspondingly, in the Introduction of their book *Going Global*, Majaj and Amireh assert that their use of this label is motivated by its "usefulness in keeping relations of power at the foreground", for them "relations between margin and center have not been levelled by the forces of globalization" (21). I argue that the protagonists whose stories I analyse in this study are indeed linked by their challenge of racisms and (neo)colonialisms. The term Third World then becomes the most suitable for its ability to capture the longstanding and lingering reductionist imaginations of women from certain parts of the world who continue to be considered inferior to and in need of their "First World" counterparts. Furthermore, this label is relevant to the current discussion because it recalls two of the most important qualities of the Orient offered by Edward Said which are sameness and timelessness. I use the term within quotation marks to highlight its problematic and questionable nature. I also use quotation marks around terms like "Western", especially when discussing issues related to cultures, with full awareness of the term's sweeping oversimplification of differences and specificities within countries and societies referred to as Western. I use the word Western advisedly in quotation marks to generally refer to the mainstream culture and not to elide and obscure the subtleties of cultural differences that such a term encompasses. The quotation marks also underscore my rejection of the dichotomous thinking that labels such as East and West raise.

the identities of "Third World" women owes its origin to imperialist, colonialist, and Orientalist discourses. Unfortunately, this simplistic imagination of women from *that* part of the world survives to this day, and is reinscribed in certain media, political, feminist, and literary discourses and works. In this thesis, I argue that *The Translator*, *One Hundred Shades of White (One Hundred)*, and *A Golden Age* are counternarratives to simplistic representations and misrepresentations of the "Third World" mother as a passive object of patriarchy and of motherhood as a source of women's oppression. I also argue that these texts are counternarratives to the clichéd representation of the "Third World" (Arab, Muslim, and South Asian) migrant woman who achieves agency only through rejecting the culture of her country of origin/heritage as a whole, migrating to the West, and embracing Western values and lifestyles.

The examination of the reductionist view of the "Third World" woman is crucial to my study of motherhood in the aforementioned texts. This is because, quite often, the "Third World" woman's victimisation is directly linked to her relationship with and position within what is known to be an inherently patriarchal family which subjugates women. In this vein, Chandra Talpade Mohanty asserts that Western feminist studies of "Third World" women have overlooked the intricacies and differences that characterise their lived experiences and given rise to what she refers to as the image of the "average Third World woman" (*Feminism Without* 22). What is crucial to the current study in Mohanty's idea of this "average" woman is the fact that her "averageness"–which implies victimisation and oppression–emanates from "the assumption of [the existence of] a singular patriarchal kinship system (common to all Arab and Muslim societies) [which] apparently structures women as an oppressed group in

these societies!" (28). Mohanty elaborates on the essentialisation of the Arab/Muslim family saying:

> Not only are all Arab and Muslim women seen to constitute a homogeneous oppressed group, but there is no discussion of the specific practices within the family that constitute women as mothers, wives, sisters, and so on. Arabs and Muslims, it appears, don't change at all. Their patriarchal family is carried over from the times of the prophet Muhammad. They exist, as it were, outside history. (28)

It is clear in this passage by Mohanty that she is concerned with certain feminist discourses which address Arab/Muslim women's "oppression" in the Arab/Muslim "patriarchal" family. Mohanty's ideas about Arab/Muslim women's stereotypical victimisation are in line with Mohja Kahf's assertion that Western literary representations of Muslim women from the eighteenth century onwards are dominated by the image of "[t]he odalisque, or concubine . . . abject and angry or virginal and victimized, but always an oppressed creature" (*Western Representations* 6).

Although Mohanty's earlier passage addresses the "patriarchal" Arab/Muslim family, her analysis of stereotypical superficial studies can be extended to cover other studies which show a monolithic image of "Third World" women in places other than Arab/Muslim countries. This is by no means an attempt on my part to simplify or obscure the differences between different "Third World" cultures, communities, and women or to claim that the "Third World" is a homogeneous entity. Nonetheless, one can argue that the simplistic image

of the passive and oppressed woman has not been strictly accorded to Arab/Muslim women, but rather to women from other "Third World" countries.

As mentioned above, this feminist discourse of victimisation can be read as a continuation or a reincarnation of Orientalist stereotypes against "Third World" countries, societies, people, and women, in particular. Mohanty in the passage above highlights the danger of this simplistic view of the lives of "Third World" women within the family. The reductive image of the "Third World" family as a patriarchal entity, the view of the "Third World" woman as an oppressed object of that family, and the act of overlooking the complexities of her life recalls Edward Said's description of the "Orient" in his *Orientalism*. In this landmark book, Said says that the Orient "tends to be static, frozen, fixed eternally. The very possibility of development, transformation, human movement–is denied the Orient and the Oriental" (208). This stasis implies a sense of backwardness and attachment to what is considered patriarchal cultures and traditions.

As a reaction to the continuation of the existence of this simplified view of the "Orient", there have been attempts by many writers of "Third World" heritage to resist the Orientalist essentialisation of women from the "Third World". However, in their attempt to dismantle stereotypes against themselves, many of these writers writing about "Third World" women have reinforced the same simplistic views which they claim to resist. The writing of such authors is problematic because in their attempt to imagine "Third World" women's ability to occupy an existence outside of the confines of the image of the victim, they end up essentialising these women through categorising them under two rubrics. "Third World" women in the writing of Monica Ali, Bharati Mukherjee, Azar Nafisi, Assia Djebar, to mention only a few women writers of "Third World" heritage, are reduced to the category of the "passive" woman who is an object of patriarchal cultures and who still abides by

patriarchy's oppressive gender roles and traditions, and the "liberated" woman who could resist patriarchy and oppression[2].

Geoffrey Nash asserts that some writings about Islam and Muslims can be read as a form of "employing recycled Orientalist tropes cast in the insider's voice" (26). He illustrates the Orientalist "insider's voice" through a number of migrant writers and their works. I will speak about two of the works he discusses in his book: Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (*Maps*). These works are crucial to the current study for their representation of the view of "Third World"/migrant motherhood to which *The Translator*, *One Hundred*, and *A Golden Age* respond and reject. In both *Brick Lane* and *Maps*, there is a mother figure who embodies the reductionist view of the Orient. The passive and oppressed "Third World" woman that these works usually represent is a mother figure who is written and spoken about by a male or female offspring. In novels such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Nadeem Aslam's *Maps*, the "traditional", "religious" mother is denigrated and portrayed as someone who is stuck in the past, unable to evolve change or even think. In both novels, the child of this negatively portrayed mother "exposes" the "evil reality" of Bangladesh and Pakistan and the backwardness of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis who are "back home" or who continue to have strong ties with those countries and their traditions through these maternal characters. The mother figures in these novels become the part that stands for the whole in their embodiment of the regressive nature of *that* part of the world. The protagonist who is in the West (Britain), since birth in the case of Aslam's character and through immigration in *Brick Lane*, completely rejects the character of the "traditional" mother. This rejection of the mother in both texts entails the disavowal of the culture of origin at large and the favouritism

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[2] I will refer to specific examples from the writing of some of these authors where instances of essentialisation are explicit later in the discussion. For an elaborated critique of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Azar Nafini's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, check Alkhateeb. For a critique of Assia Djebar's representation of Algerian women, see Lazreg's *The Eloquence of Silence* 198.

and adoption of "Western" lifestyles and cultures. In other words, in these novels by writers of "Third World" heritage, the woman, more precisely the mother, is often presented as a victim of her oppressive culture and tradition. This means that this character's salvation lies in the disavowal of the supposed source of her oppression–her culture of heritage–and the adoption of "Western" emancipating lifestyles.

Brick Lane is about the representation of "Third World" and female migrant identity in South Asian migrant literature. In analysing the character of Nazneen, the protagonist in *Brick Lane*, Nash claims that "Ali's programme for Nazneen is that she escape[s] the 'fate' that women such as her mother have to endure in Bangladesh". He goes on speaking about Nazneen's mother, Rupban, or rather her invisibility, in the narrative saying: "[f]or most of the novel the mother's death remains unaccounted for" (37). Nash's analysis captures the absence and the invisibility of Nazneen's mother in the narrative. Ostensibly, the reason for this character's invisibility, which echoes a sense of unworthiness, is her location in Bangladesh and her maternal role. Undoubtedly, Nazneen's story can be perceived as a narrative of a migrant mother's success in resisting patriarchy, in defying her patriarchal husband who describes her as being "[n]ot tall. Not short . . . [h]ips are a bit narrow but wide enough to carry children . . . a blind uncle is better than no uncle . . . she is a good worker. Cleaning and cooking and all that" (Ali 11), and in cultivating a new home abroad where she feels accomplished. Nevertheless, Ali's juxtaposition between the living conditions of women in Bangladesh as opposed to those whose life in the West reinforces the idea that "there is no room for feminist enfranchisement at home in Bangladesh" (Nash 37). Nazneen's "success" in defying Bangladesh's hegemony and misogyny is a result of her existence *in* the West. By confining success to the characters position in England, Ali reinscribes the East-West binarism which recalls the old Orientalist vision of the "Third World". Ali's text thus

reinforces the stereotypes of passivity and backwardness associated with Bangladeshi women.

The representation of motherhood in *Brick Lane* recalls Mohanty's aforementioned idea that the "Third World" woman's victimisation and backwardness are attributed to gender roles, among which, her role as a mother in an essentially patriarchal family. In *Brick Lane*, the mother character Rupban, is portrayed as someone who is very naïve. Even when she is told, very early in the narrative, that her daughter Nazneen is born very weak and she might need to be taken to the hospital in the city, she refuses to take her because she thinks that if she does, that means she is fighting against her fate: "we must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it" (3). This surrender of the mother to her "Fate" implies that she is passive and even shallow. Nazneen's mother is not the only maternal figure who embodies the reductionist stereotypes of the "Third World" woman/mother. Nazneen is herself a mother of two daughters and a son who dies of fever as an infant. Before the "metamorphoses" which Nazneen witnesses when she adopts a "Western" lifestyle, she, like her mother, was an oppressed passive wife and mother. The following passage exemplifies the restricted life she used to live before her "liberation": "[s]he looked at her stomach that hid her feet and forced her to lean back to counter its weight. She looked and she saw that she was trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity." Before becoming pregnant, Nazneen lives a monotonous confined life. However, becoming a mother, makes her situation worse. Her motherhood gives her husband more reason to confine her and deprive her of her desires such as her desire to learn English (57). Both examples of mothers, one located in Bangladesh and the other in London, suffer similarly due to Bangladeshi patriarchal culture and due to their motherhood.

Not very different from the maternal figure represented in Ali's text, Aslam's figure of the mother in *Maps* is very negatively portrayed. Nash argues that Aslam's narrative is one

in which “superstition, bigotry and cruelty are the ubiquitous norm” (41). Nash maintains that Kaukab, the mother character in the novel, is presented as “[a] fanatically religious” woman (41). She is, Nash contends, involved in the downfall or life-threatening incidents of many of the novel’s characters including her own children (41). One of the most significant passages in the novel that shows the denigrated manner in which the mother is described and which Nash quotes in his study is when the narrator says: “[t]rapped within the cage of permitted thinking, this woman–her mother–is the most dangerous animal she’ll ever have to confront” (41), speaking about Kaukab in relation to her daughter. The mother is not only a symbol of stasis and backwardness, but she is also equated with a dangerous animal which implies aggression and unpredictability. Another very significant passage in the novel about the simplistic negative image of the “Third World” mother in the text is in a scene that shows a discussion between Kaukab’s daughter and son. In the following scene, the two siblings discuss why their mother does not go out of the house: “[s]he has little English and she feels nervous stepping out of the house” the sister responds, “[s]he would have been exactly like this if she weren’t here in England. What were her achievements back in Pakistan where she can speak the language” (323). As it can be seen in these short passages from the works of these writers of “Third World” heritage, two main tropes dominate the narratives. These tropes are: the stereotypical Orientalist representation of the country of origin–and by extension its culture and tradition–and the Orientalist imagination of women and in particular mothers. The mother in novels such as *Brick Lane* and *Maps* exemplify what Aneja and Vaidya call “transient carrier vessel for patriarchy” (149).

The view of “Third World” motherhood as it is represented in texts such as Ali’s and Aslam’s can be found even in academic and scholarly works. These works support the claim that “Third World” countries are essentially patriarchal, and that women’s oppression is a result of these communities’ relationship with their cultures, religious beliefs, and traditions.

By emphasising certain oversimplified ideas about the “Third World” and writers of “Third World” heritage, I by no means argue that writers should accept misogyny which does certainly exist in “Third World” societies. My aim is rather to point to what the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie refers to as “the danger of a single story”. By the single story she means the negative, stereotypical and dominant view that is propagated about certain people or communities, “[t]he single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (13:11-13:24). This means that what makes certain discourses and works, fiction and non-fiction, deemed reductive and stereotypical is their focus on stereotypes that are already prevalent about a certain community *without* equally highlighting other aspects of those very communities. The result of such propagation of stereotype is a partial “reality”. Dalya Abudi’s *Mother and Daughters in Arab women’s Literature: The Family Frontier* (2011) is a study of the representation of motherhood in a number of Arab women’s literary texts. This study is an example of academic works which not only extensively highlight the negative image of mothers that feature in a number of literary texts, but they also consider the simplistic representations of mothers as reflections of the ultimate misery which women in Arab/Muslim patriarchal families and societies actually have to endure. Abudi asserts that the majority of the texts that she analyses present mothers who are “illiterate, veiled, and cloistered. Restricted to domestic activities, they are economically dependent on their husbands” (300). What makes her study exemplary of scholarly works that reinforce stereotypical images about “Third World” mothers is not only her focus on texts that present reductive views on Arab/Muslim women, but also her own arguments and conclusions which are in line with the images of mothers that the literary texts feature. Abudi proclaims that in order to complete her book and to answer questions relative to the mother-daughter relationship, she “travelled to Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jerusalem.” She claims

that her study "is the untold story behind the many women's stories gathered in this work" (x). She considers this study "[her] own individual story, and yet, in many ways, it is Everywoman's story" (x). This suggests that what she presents in this book is much more than a study of literary representations of mother-daughter relationship. A major issue is Abudi's study is its claim of telling "Everywoman's story"[3].

The claims that are made in Abudi's study such as the fact that her study of mother-daughter relationships in the Arab family gives her access to the dynamics of the Arab culture and society at large (6) are very problematic. She asserts that her study "reveals the inner workings of the patriarchal system–its ideology, institutions, moral code, gendered and aged domination, sexual division of labor, and mechanisms of reproduction" (6). It is clear in Abudi's words that her own argument is in line with the view of the "Third World" that features in the texts that she analyses. It is true that Abudi mentions that Arab families, thus societies, are witnessing a slow but worth-praising progress. However, what makes her work problematic, if not simplistic and stereotypical, is the fact that, first, as seen earlier, she presents her study and the works that she analyses as a reflection of the reality of Arab/Muslim societies. Second, the fact that she essentialises Arab/Muslim cultures, traditions, beliefs, and kinship relations as being purely patriarchal and as *the* ultimate reasons behind the victimisation of women. According to Abudi, the fact that the mother in the texts that she analyses is subservient, passive, oppressed, and even restrictive of her daughter's freedom and achievements, "the daughter cannot help but feel contempt, pity, and rage toward her submissive and subservient mother. She rejects the mother's legacy of

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[3] This issue of generalisation of "Third World" women's experiences is discussed by Lila Abu-Lughod in her *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* She addresses at length the issues that arise with memoirs of a number of Arab and or Muslim writers which are predominantly occupied by the representation of victimised Arab/Muslim. Abu-Lughod argues that "although they are told in the first person of individual women, the traumas and abuses they catalog do not present themselves to readers as unique to these individuals. They are always con- textualized by culture". She goes on explaining that "these memoirs cannot give readers any indication that such abuses–whether incest, rape, beatings, or other cruelties–might be exceptional, or might be considered as horrifying in those communities as they would be in ours" (89-90).

victimization" (274). As it is clear from the few passages that I quoted from Abudi's work, the works that she analyses are predominantly written by daughters and mostly narrated by daughters as well. This question of narrative perspective is one of the issues that my research addresses. I look at how the three texts offer matrifocal or matrilineal narratives which brings the maternal voice to the fore after being overtaken by that of the daughter.

Although in her study of simplistic constructions of the "Third World" woman, Mohanty states that her critique is not confined to "Western" feminists, and that it extends to women who write about "Third World" women in a simplistic stereotypical manner regardless of being in the West or in the "Third World" (21), her study does not accord writing by "Third World" women significant attention. A more direct critique, and one which addresses even literary texts, of "Third World" women writing which propagates the image of the victimised oppressed woman comes from Marnia Lazreg[4].

Throughout her article "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria", Lazreg argues that the reductive representations of "Third World" women owe to the way in which differences between women in the "Third World" and in the West are perceived. She asserts that the particularities which characterise the lives of women from "Third World" are negatively seen compared to those which characterise the lives of Western women. The othering of "Third World" women is "often carried out with the help of Middle Eastern and North African women themselves". Lazreg calls this issue of representing "Third World" women very simplistically focusing only on the negative aspects of their lives, "the dilemma of Third World women writing about Third World women" ("Feminism and Difference" 98). An example of writings by "Third World" women about

[4] The ideas of Marnia Lazreg about "Third World" women writing about "Third World" women can be used to discuss and analyse works by writers of "Third World" heritage who might not necessarily identify as "Third world" writers.

their own women which Lazreg discusses is that of the francophone Algerian writer Assia Djebar. Lazreg writes that Djebar's writing is characterised by the representation of "native women's life-styles. The litany of complaints about 'tradition' and Islam stifles her characters' voices and turns them into pitiful, empty-headed puppets" (*The Eloquence of Silence* 201). Lazreg's comment suggests that Djebar's writing about Algerian women is stereotypical, and it can be seen as one which perpetuates old imperialist and colonialist images of "Third World" women as "traditional", passive, oppressed, and unable to think for themselves. Both scholars, Mohanty and Lazreg, argue that "Third World" women and their societies are often seen under reductionist lenses both in fictional and non-fictional works.

These stereotypes of the oppression of women by social gender norms, specifically motherhood, in literature and in certain feminist writings, by Western as well as "Third World" women or those of "Third World" heritage, is what the novels under study resist. What differs, though, between these novels' resistance of victimisation and other works mentioned above such as those of Djebar, Nafisi, Ali, among others, is that *The Translator*, *One Hundred*, and *A Golden Age* do not reinscribe the same stereotypes they attempt to dismantle. Aboulela, Nair, and Anam do not *simply* resist the discourse of patriarchy, which they do acknowledge and condemn, they also resist Orientalist views about their cultures, women, and motherhood. The approach of these writers' texts is in parallel with Lazreg's idea of "Third World" women writers' resistance of stereotypical images against them. She says, in resisting stereotypical discourses about "Third World" women, "Third World" women writers "cannot satisfy themselves with a mere act of negation". The way to succeed in dismantling the stereotypic discourse about themselves is, according to Lazreg, a dual process of "breaking with" it as well as a "reevaluation" of the "structure of gender relations in their own societies" ("Feminism and Difference" 101). This model of resistance to Orientalist simplistic imagination of the "Third World" woman, her gender roles, her family

dynamics, and her culture is adopted by the three writers in the novels under discussion in this thesis.

Lazreg's idea of resisting stereotypical imaginations through negation is relevant not only to the examination of motherhood in literature but to the study of motherhood in general. Motherhood as represented in literature or in other discourses such as media, feminist scholarship, and academia is sometimes either idealised or negatively perceived as being a source of women's oppression. The negative representation of motherhood has gained popularity with the writings of early second-wave feminists, and it continues to feature in the literature and in academic and scholarly works of today. Many works of literature as well as academic and scholarly studies have focused on the representation of negative aspects of motherhood or on its complete rejection in order to promote "non-normative" modes of mothering. [5] The main characteristic of the negative representations and theorisations of motherhood is that they are told from a daughter's perspective; the maternal voice has been silenced by that of the daughter when it comes to women's writing about motherhood.

A ground-breaking oeuvre that pioneered in unveiling the decades' long relationship between the absence of mothers' stories and matrophobia is Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1986). In the chapter entitled "Motherhood and Daughterhood", Rich defines matrophobia as:

[5] By non-normative modes of motherhood I mean images of mothers who do not ascribe to the "normative" "traditional" image of the mother as self-sacrificial, pious, selfless, devoted, all-time loving.

> a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (236)

Rich also refers to matrophobia as the daughters' "fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother*" (emphasis in original 235). This fear of becoming the "victim", the "unfree", and the "martyr" mother is what makes feminist daughters in theory or in fiction exclude mothers or portray them negatively as passive victims, agents of patriarchy, or domineering and impeding to their daughters' quest for self-realisation. Rich contends that writing her book is a sign of the end of the long-lived silence of mothers (25). Another major work which deals with the dominance of daughters' narratives both in feminist theories and in literature is Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother / Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989). In her book, Hirsch discusses mothers' absence and negative image in texts of daughters from the nineteenth century up until the date of the publication of her text in 1989. She contends that mothers of nineteenth-century novels are "either powerful and angry to the point of madness . . . or they are frustrated, trivial, inconsequential, sometimes comic. Falling into neither of these categories, dead or absent mothers are, ironically, the only positive maternal figures we hear about" (47).

This negative perception of the mother and the absence of her voice is heightened with the writing of early second-wave feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir. Speaking about the mother in the early stages of pregnancy, Simone de Beauvoir contends that "[w]ith her ego surrendered, alienated in her body and in her social dignity, the mother enjoys the comforting illusion of feeling that she is a human *in herself*, *a value*. But this is only an

illusion" (emphasis in original qtd. in Patrice DiQuinzio 102). As quoted in DiQuizio, de Beauvoir continues explaining that in pregnancy, "[the mother] does not really make the baby, it makes itself within her … the child in the maternal body … is still only a gratuitous cellular growth, a brute fact of nature … she engenders him as a product of her generalized body, not of her individualized existence" (qtd. in Diquinzio 102). According to de Beauvoir, the mother does not really possess a self, value, or agency. For de Beauvoir, the child seems to have power "mak[ing] itself" in the passive body of the mother who thinks that she is a subject when in fact she is a mere object of the foetus. While Rich says that de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone "perceive women's maternal function as, quite simply and precisely, the root of our oppression" (57), in 2005, Andrea O'Reilly and Marie Porter argue that this is an ongoing feminist debate in which "[f]eminists argued, and still argue, about whether the early stages of feminism actually *were* anti-mother" (emphasis in original 2).

The 1970s feminist writers' relationship with the maternal is exemplified in their celebration of "[the] metaphor of sisterhood, of friendship or of surrogate motherhood" as an alternative to the relationship with the mother (Hirsch 164). Hirsch contends that the feminist daughters' adoption and celebration of the slogan "'sisterhood is powerful' isolate[s] feminist discourse within one generation" and it also "banish[es] feminists who are mothers to the 'mother-closet'" (164). The advantage of this bonding between "sisters", is as Hirsch explains, these "'Sisters' can be 'maternal' to one another without allowing their bodies to be invaded by men and the physical acts of pregnancy, birth, and lactation. In this family romance, sisters are better mothers, providing more nurturance and a greater encouragement of autonomy" (164). This new model of relationality recalls the nature of mother/daughter relationship of nineteenth century and early feminist writing in its matrophobic character

where the mother is considered a passive victim of patriarchy, an agent of patriarchy, and a hindering force to the feminist daughter's quest for autonomy.

In 1991, in *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities,* Maureen T. Reddy and Brenda O. Daly assert that "[f]ew fictional or theoretical works begin with the mother in her own right, from her own perspective, and those that do seldom hold fast to a maternal perspective; further, when texts do maintain this perspective, readers and critics tend to suppress the centrality of mothering" (2-3). Reddy and Daly call texts that are narrated by daughters "daughter-centric" (2). This is a matter that has been addressed by Hirsch who proclaims that in "daughter-centric narratives", "to speak for the mother . . . is at once to give voice to her discourse and to silence and marginalize her" (16). The mother, then, "remains in the position of *other*, and the emergence of feminine-daughterly subjectivity rests and depends on that continued and repeated process of *othering* the mother" (emphasis in original 136). Reddy and Daly assert that "the subjectivity of mothers often disappears from even the most sensitive feminist discussions of mothering" (1). This critique of feminist "writing" of the maternal is targeted at Rich's *Of Woman Born*. In their critique of Rich's emphasis on "women" in general rather than on "mothers", they argue that "Rich says that the question 'But what was it like for women?' was always in her mind as she researched and wrote" (qtd. In Reddy and Daly 1), however, "the very phrasing of the question that animated her landmark work illustrates a representative slippage from 'mother' to 'women'" (Reddy and Daly 1). Reddy and Daly further elaborate on daughter centric narratives through referring to the dominance of the daughter's perspective in the study of mother-child relationship in feminist psychoanalysis. They point at studies by Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Carol Gilligan (2). Daly and Reddy claim that "all three write from a daughter's perspective, paying attention mostly to the effects of current conditions of mothering on children's progression into adulthood". They add that, "[i]n feminist

psychoanalytic studies, we frequently learn less about what it is like to mother than about what it is like to be mothered, even when the author has both experiences" (2). Daly and Reddy are not the only critics of feminist psychoanalysis' emphasis on the daughter's perspective at the expense of that of the mother. Hirsch also criticises a feminist psychoanalytic approach to motherhood which is child-centred and offers an elaborated analysis of French feminist psychoanalysis and French feminism's writing about motherhood. Undeniably, French feminist writers such as Hélène Cixous, and French feminist psychoanalysts like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray have offered valuable contributions to the study of motherhood and mother-child relationship, however, their writing has been subject of criticism. Hirsch summarises French feminism and French psychoanalysis's failure to account for the mother as a subject in her own right as follows:

> While psychoanalytic feminisms have added the female child to the male, they have not succeeded in inscribing the perspective of adult women. The adult woman who is a mother, in particular, continues to exist only in relation to her child, never as a subject in her own right. And in her maternal function, she remains an object, always distanced, always idealized or denigrated, always mystified, always represented through the small child's point of view. (167)

Not only is the mother an object of the child's "healthy" development into adulthood, in the writing of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, the mother features as a metaphor of women's writing. Hirsch contends that: "Cixous's mother's milk and menstrual blood, or Irigaray's labia, are figures for feminine writing and speech, just as maternity is Kristeva's figure for poetry", she adds, "[f]or Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, the body is not a matter but metaphor, and their gestures of reconstruction are figural enough not to have to include the mother's literally pregnant body" (166). The above review of some of the works about the

maternal, or rather, its absence and silence shows that this absence and silence is a result of the dominance of the narrative of motherhood by daughters' voices which are filled with matrophobia or is a result of keeping the mother in the position of an object of the child's development; both result in the loss of the mother's subjectivity.

Nevertheless, in the last few decades, there have been many efforts by writers, critics, and theorists to write the maternal. Andrea O'Reilly and Silvia Caporale Bizzini, in *From the Personal to the Political: Toward a New Theory of Maternal Narrative*, assert that, "[t]oday, authors and scholars, while acknowledging this difficulty in speaking that which has been censored, distorted, and silenced, struggle to make the maternal *story* narratable in both literature and *theory*" (emphasis in original 27). Among the most prominent figures that privilege the maternal narrative and voice in feminist theory and literary criticism are Andrea O'Reilly and Emily Jeremiah. Their works bring to the fore topics that have been suppressed such as maternal subjectivity, nuanced accounts of motherhood experiences, maternal narratives that resist patriarchal influences on motherhood as well as empowering modes of mothering. This point of the nature of the narratives by and/or about mothers takes us back to Rich's *Of Woman Born* and to her famous distinction between the institution of motherhood and mothering which continues to be a major point of reference in contemporary theorisations of motherhood. In this distinction, Rich differentiates between two meanings of motherhood: the "institution of motherhood" and "mothering". In this distinction, she describes the latter as: "the *potential* relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction–and to children; and the *institution*–which aims at ensuring that that potential–and all women–shall remain under male control" (13). In addition to the distinction, Rich emphasises the importance of presenting both sides of motherhood in works about the maternal. Speaking about her own experience, Rich proclaims: "my children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence:

the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness” (21). This very success to discuss or represent both sides or meanings of motherhood becomes a real issue in feminist writing with texts usually described as either idealising or denouncing of motherhood.

In *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts*, Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O’Reilly highlight the shift from “daughter-centric stories . . . to matrilineal and matrifocal perspectives that have emerged over the last few decades” (2). In the same book, Podnieks and O’Reilly define a matrifocal text, based on Miriam Johnson’s definition, as “one in which a mother plays a role of cultural and social significance, and in which motherhood is thematically elaborated and valued, and structurally central to the plot” (3). This importance and centrality of the maternal figure has the potential of “unmasking motherhood and redefining maternity” (5). Matrifocal narratives also challenge the silence and objectification that the mother character has for long witnessed. A matrilineal narrative is, Podnieks and O’Reilly argue, quoting Yu’s definition, “one which either tells the stories of several generations of women at once, or which shows how the identity of a central character is crucially formed by her female ancestors” (qtd. in Podnieks and O’Reilly 20).

These matrifocal and matrilineal narratives are significant for their ability to capture the complexity of the maternal experience and for reclaiming maternal subjectivities. Luann E. Hiebert’s study, “Encountering Maternal Silence: Writing Strategies for Negotiating Margins of Mother/ing in Contemporary Canadian Prairie Women’s Poetry”, is part of the ongoing research which is concerned with the study of the maternal in works of literature that challenge its silence. Although her study is primarily concerned with the analysis of poetry, I find it offers a compelling examination of the theme of maternal silence. The poems that Hiebert analyses “represent the both/and—favourable, undesirable, ambiguous— experiences of maternal subjectivities; that is, the positive, negative, and ambivalent aspects of mother/ing

. . . In fashioning various forms of doubling, these poets resist monologic ideologies and subvert either/or dichotomies" (249). Such a representation which depicts both sides of motherhood allows for a complex view of the maternal. Matrifocal and matrilineal texts depart from patriarchal oppressive views of motherhood as well as from some feminist one-dimensional views which perceive the mother as an embodiment of patriarchy. Matrifocal and matrilineal texts portray both sides of motherhood (positive and negative). Podnieks and O'Reilly explain that this view of motherhood as a multifaceted experience presents a more "authentic" image of motherhood (15-6)[6].

Amidst the ongoing efforts, as explained above, to reclaim the maternal voice and to present complex "authentic" narratives of motherhood in which both the negative and the positive aspects of the experience of the maternal are delineated, representations embracing motherhood with both its aspects remain a minority. Undeniably, there are literary texts, especially matrilineal, in which the positive and empowering aspect of motherhood is presented. However, representations of negative aspects of motherhood are more prominent. Despite its ability to challenge patriarchal motherhood, putting an emphasis only on the negative aspects of motherhood might be very harmful. Psychoanalyst Barbara Almond proclaims maternal ambivalence as "that mixture of loving and hating feelings that *all mothers* experience toward their children" (emphasis in original 2)[7]. Reading *We Need to Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver (2003), Almond calls it "a disturbing novel" (122). She highlights the novel's "insistence on hopeless, unremitting, and incurable mother-child

[6] The word "authentic" is used by Podnieks and O'Reilly to refer to representations of motherhood that depict the "lived" realities of mothers and in which nuanced accounts of the experience are represented from the mother's point of view.

[7] Maternal ambivalence is one of the tropes that characterise matrifocal narratives and is one of the themes that make of these texts "authentic" narratives, check Podnieks and O'Reilly.

hatred" (122). She considers the novel's portrayal of only this "dark side" of motherhood to be "admittedly extreme" (140).

Emily Jeremiah's reading of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* asserts that the text's representation of pregnancy and childbirth recalls radical feminists' views of both experiences. As an illustration, Jeremiah cites Simone de Beauvoir who refers to the pregnant woman as "the prey of the species", and Shulamith Firestone who defines childbirth as "shitting a watermelon" (Jeremiah 175). However, Jeremiah acknowledges the text's potential in "deconstruct[ing] mothering", for her, the novel "constitutes progress, enriching existing debates about parenthood and opening up new lines of inquiry" (123) via "testing maternal ambivalence to the limit" (175). In a similar vein, O'Reilly states, "it is precisely Eva's candid, retrospective meditations on her mothering that allow for an authentic critique of patriarchal motherhood" (66). I agree with Jeremiah and O'Reilly in that the novel does have the potential to destabilise hegemonic patriarchal attitudes towards motherhood. However, my contention is related to the very essence of maternal ambivalence being "[a] contradictory state of mind, shared variously by all mothers, in which loving and hating feelings for children exists side by side" (Parker 17). I argue, in line with Almond's reading of *We need to Talk*, that despite being widely received as a text that perfectly represents maternal ambivalence, the novel is overwhelmingly about the mother's feelings of hate towards her son rather than ambivalence.

There is no doubt that the representation of the negative side of motherhood has the potential of offering an image of motherhood that does not ascribe to the essentialism of patriarchy. However, I argue that highlighting and overemphasising only this side of motherhood is as harmful as the discourses which it aspires to resist. Among the scholars who highlighted the necessity of discussing or representing a "well balanced view" of

motherhood are Sara Ruddick and Susan Suleiman[8]. Ruddick warns against the danger of focusing solely on the oppressive side of motherhood saying: "[a]lthough one can sympathize with the anger that insists upon and emphasizes the oppressive nature of maternal practices, an account that describes only exploitation and pain is itself oppressive to women" (344). In *Embodying Motherhood: Perspectives from Contemporary India*, Anu Aneja and Shubhangi Vaidya quoting Susan Suleiman argue for the necessity "to imagine the mother laughing" (xvi).

In addition to the issue of what Aneja and Vaidya refer to as "the dominant feminist imperative to focus exclusively on narratives of pain and oppression at the expense of other narratives of pleasure" (204), other images of motherhood which may also subvert patriarchy, and which do not receive considerable attention are those featuring "traditional" modes of mothering[9]. Since patriarchal motherhood imposes on mothers a certain model to follow, aspects of this model come to be associated with patriarchal motherhood[10]. For instance, devotion and care, self-sacrifice, and domesticity (among other "ideals") become aspects that are either entirely rejected or marginalised in representation and scholarship. In other words, quite often, when we speak of texts that subvert the patriarchal views of motherhood, the texts that come to one's mind are those portraying "non-normative" mothers such as those who display negative feelings and attitudes towards motherhood and their children.

Undoubtedly, literary representations of "non-normative" or "non-traditional" mothers are successful ways of offering diverse and in many instances empowering models

[8]I borrow the expression "well balanced view" from Lau who discusses the representation of the joint family in South Asian literary texts specifically Shashi Deshpande's in "Emotional and Domestic Territories: The Positionality of Women as Reflected in the Landscape of the Home in Contemporary South Asian Women's Writings".
[9] Although I do not entirely agree with Aneja and Vaidya in that there is a "dominant feminist imperative to focus on exclusively on narratives of pain and oppression" (204), I do believe that in the efforts to subvert patriarchal motherhood, speaking about its pleasures continues to occupy a much smaller space than that of motherhood pains or the negative side of ambivalence both in literature and in scholarship.
[10]Patriarchal motherhood is what Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* refers to as "the institution of motherhood".

of mothering. However, norms are not always represented as sources of confinement and oppression in certain literary texts. For instance, in each of the novels that I analyse in this thesis, the maternal characters engage with the "norms" of motherhood in a very complex way. I argue that one of the main issues with regard to the negative perception of norms is "the normative binary associations of 'tradition' with women's oppression" (Aneja and Vaidya xxiii). Due to the three novels' problematic representation of the characters' engagement with norms of motherhood (which I will elaborate in detail when I discuss the division of chapters), the texts offer another vision of literary representations of contemporary motherhood. In this vision, maternal agency and subjectivity are achieved through engaging in different ways with the "ideals" of motherhood.

In *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, Andrea Liss explores what she describes as "[t]he dilemma . . . [of] how to speak of the difficulties and incomparable beauties of the maternal without having those variously inflected and complex experiences turned into cliché of what enduring motherhood is supposed to be". She carries on explaining that "the real pleasures of caring for a new other and falling in love again differently" are considered "taboo" and "are tyrannically conflated with essentialism, romanticised qualities projected as implacable and designed to keep us assigned to our 'proper places'" (xviii). Liss's words suggest that there is a side motherhood which is dropped off the dominant scholarship and representations of motherhood. In her book she claims that she "revalues certain traditional characteristics of the maternal, such as nurturance, care, empathy, and passion and projects these supposedly 'sentimental' maternal traits outside their previously limited range. Thus, they can be seen anew as loving and political acts" (xxi).

My work can well be considered a continuation to the efforts of scholars and critics who analyse literary texts which feature subversive modes of mothering such as *Motherhood in Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Europe* by Gill Rye, Victoria

Browne, Adalgisa Giorgio, Emily Jeremiah, Abigail Lee Six (2018) and Andrea O'Reilly's work, especially *Textual Mothers Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures* (2010) which she edited with Elizabeth Podnieks. However, my study adds to their effort by including representations of motherhood that are not as popular as other portrayals of subversion. The three novels that I analyse in this thesis problematise the very notion of "normative" motherhood which came to imply an acceptance of patriarchy and oppression of women. The characters that this thesis is concerned with seem to embrace "traditional" female gender ideals, such as domesticity, piety, and maternal devotion among other ideals that are often considered reasons for women's oppression and subordination. Nonetheless, this embodiment of "traditional" or "normative" aspects of womanhood and motherhood does not necessarily mean that these mother figures are oppressed, passive, or lack agency.

Sammar, protagonist of Aboulela's *The Translator*, feels lost after the death of her husband and wants to get married to an already-married old man (an idea that she dismisses later in the narrative). After "healing" from her husband's grief, Sammar falls deeply in love with Rae, a British non-Muslim, whom she begs to become Muslim so they can get married (127). This means that to follow the teachings of her religion–Islam, she is ready to sacrifice this relationship[11]. Wail S. Hassan argues that, "[i]n *The Translator*, Sammar clings to gender roles sometimes considered outdated even back in Sudan" (197). He continues arguing that "Aboulela's Islamism and the fiction that embodies it . . . [are] in many ways regressive" (198). For him, Aboulela's approach in representing female characters reflects "[a] rejection

[11] As a devout Muslim, Sammar cannot be with Rae unless he becomes Muslim and unless they get married. In one of the scenes, the narrator states that Sammar wanted to tell Rae: "unless you become a Muslim we will not be able to get married, we will not be together and I will be miserable and alone" (p. 89). Also, when Sammar's friend Yasmin asks her: "[a]re you going to marry someone who's not a Muslim?", Sammar answers: "Of course not, that would be against the sharia" (92).

of feminism [and is] tied as it is to a total denial of freedom and agency" (197). Sammar, thus, according to this view, might be perceived as an embodiment of the Orientalist stereotype of the backward Arab/Muslim "traditional" woman who lacks freedom and agency.

Similarly, Nalini, the mother figure in Nair's *One Hundred* and one of the two main narrators in the novel, is attached to the domestic sphere, and her devotion to her children can be seen as a re-enactment of the "traditional ideals" of womanhood and motherhood. Nalini's children are central to everything she does. When her husband runs away, to clandestinely join his other wife and children in America, leaving the newly migrated Nalini and their two children in England on their own, Nalini ceases to care about herself. Rather, she says: "[m]y only concern was for my children, to protect, provide for them and to make sure they evolved into good people" (86). This devotion and self-sacrifice, the fact that Nalini is not concerned about her emotional and financial weakness, might likely be considered a sign of lack of subjectivity from a progressive individualistic point of view. Nalini might be read as a character who is compliant with the "ideal" of the selfless mother which renders her an object of her children. E. Ann Kaplan writes "[t]he mother-sacrifice pattern uncritically embodies the patriarchal unconscious and represents woman's positioning as lack, absence, signifier of passivity" (124). This quote summarises the common understanding and the usual negativity attached to the representation of maternal sacrifice or selflessness. In addition to Nalini's selflessness, the centrality of cooking in her life, a task often thought of as belonging to the domestic, thus "feminine", sphere could be read as a sign of relapse to "traditional" gender norms of domesticity and female confinement. Barbara Haber and Arlene Voski Avakian contend in *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies* that cooking in feminist scholarship was considered "merely a marker of patriarchal oppression" (2).

In the third example, Anam's *A Golden Age*, Rehana has a complex relationship with the trope of the mother as nation which prevails in certain nationalist and masculinist male writing. In her criticism of male writers' nationalist writing, Catherine Lynette Innes asserts that images of the woman as "the repository or carrier of traditional culture" and "of men as her saviours" prevails in male writing of the nation (140-1). Similarly, Neluka Silva asserts that Bangladeshi male nationalist literature is dominated by the image of the woman who is "imprisoned in the role of [the] passive, grieving mother" (157). Rehana as a widowed mother who inhabits the domestic sphere and does not "participate" in the armed struggle of Bangladesh against Pakistan seemingly complies with "feminine", stereotypically patriarchal, ideals of the nationalist trope of the mother as a symbol of nation. The novel opens with Rehana grieving the death of her husband and the loss of custody of her children to her brother-in-law, Faiz, who resides in Pakistan–then West Pakistan. She is also presented as a selfless mother: "she had no intention of remarrying . . . ever since the children had returned, the urge to be loved in that way had disappeared from her altogether" (23). Rehana's life and her relationship with her family members echoes to a considerable extent the emergence of Bangladesh as a newly independent nation. An explicit allusion to the mother as a symbol of nation is found in the narrator's statement that Rehana "was something else–a mother, yes, but not just of children. Mother of a different sort" (140). The passages hint to the idea that Rehana is a symbolic mother of the nation's "saviours" and is also the mother of the nation, or that she *is* the nation.

The above suggests that Sammar, Nalini, and Rehana seem to exemplify the patriarchal view of motherhood. This misreading of the three characters' representation of the experience of motherhood owes to the fact that the mother figures in the three novels do not always reject social norms and gender roles that are often associated with patriarchal motherhood and patriarchy in general. However, this embodiment of social norms and

"traditional" gender roles does not produce the expected result–oppression and subordination. The mother characters in these stories, rather than being oppressed by norms, emerge as subjects as a result of this negotiation of social norms between resistance, revision or performance with difference, and adoption.

The characters' embodiment of seemingly oppressive norms is reminiscent of Saba Mahmood's theorisation, in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, of social norms of piety which are, as she explains, usually correlated with women's oppression and subjugation[12]. What I find relatable and relevant to the representation of motherhood and gender norms in the three novels in Mahmood's ideas is her argument that norms "are not only consolidated and/or subverted . . .but performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways" (22). She also argues that since the way in which norms are engaged with is culturally and historically specific, the meaning of agency should not be predetermined and confined to one's ability to resist norms (14). This according to her means that: "what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency" (14-5).

This idea of the characters' relationship with norms is crucial to the current discussion of the three texts' representation of motherhood for its relatedness to the maternal characters' agency and subjectivity. Since as argued above, in line with Aneja and Vaidya's argument, "tradition" is stereotypically associated with women's oppression, the characters' different ways of engaging with, at times adopting, "traditional" norms might imply lack of agency. Nonetheless, adoption of social norms should not be romanticised. The characters in the novel do not simply embody all social norms of womanhood and motherhood and deny the

[12]Saba Mahmood is an anthropologist whose work is concerned with women issues and gender roles especially in relation to secularism and religion.

existence of patriarchy. As I have mentioned earlier, social norms and gender roles of motherhood are at times revised and even rejected.

Take for instance the novels' problematisation of maternal love. The representation of ambivalence could be interpreted as a way of problematising the notion of constant maternal love–one of the ideals of patriarchal motherhood. The novels do not completely reject maternal love, they rather portray mother figures who experience both love and hate–or in the case of Nalini and Rehana, mothers who find it very hard to have a smooth relationship with one of their children. In *A Golden Age*, the "ideals" that are problematised or rejected are the idea of the asexual/pious widowed nationalist mother and the trope of the mother as nation as a carrier and preserver of traditions and culture against intruders. Although Rehana embodies the trope of mother as nation, her character resists the discourse of the asexual mother which is associated with the representation of the mother as nation. Rehana subverts this asexuality through her ninety-six day love relationship with the Major and her sexual encounter with him. Her love for him "wasn't like the love for children. It wasn't like the love of home. Or the accidental love of her husband. It was a swallowing, hungry love" (215). In addition to the significance of this love affair, Rehana's initial uncertainties regarding her nationalism and her fluctuating sense of belonging disrupt the trope of the mother as a carrier of traditions and culture which prevail in male nationalist narratives. Many scenes in the novel demonstrate Rehana's uncertain sense of belonging. One of them is the one when her son, Sohail, brings her the Bangladeshi flag. In response, she says: "A flag without a country" when everyone else in the room is very elated at this momentous event (48).

Despite their differences, the novels are parallel in their nuanced approach of representing the "Third World" migrant mother. Nash writes that much of the literature of British migrant writers presents an "assault on the traditional practices of an ethnically based immigrant community living in the UK in the name of liberal western values" (27). The three

novels under discussion depart from such stereotypes, resisting simplistic representations of migrant women's identity, disparagement of the countries of origin/heritage, and the idealisation of the West[13]. Another major similarity between the three texts that I examine in this thesis is that they are matrifocal narratives or, what Gill Rye calls "narratives of mothering"; these are "literary texts where the mother is herself either the first-person narrative subject or, in third-person narratives, the figure whose point of view is paramount" (*Narratives of Mothering* 17).

It is clear from the above review of the literature on the study of motherhood that although my research is about migrant motherhood, I relied heavily on Anglo/European scholarship about the maternal. This is due to the lack of theorisation and representation of migrant motherhood where the maternal perspective is prominent. In *Contemporary Children's and Young Adult Literature* (2021), Charlotte Beyer claims that "cultural and literary representations focusing specifically on mothers travelling or migrating are few and far between" (103). Similarly, discussing the representation of motherhood and migration in two South African plays, Ksenia Robbe argues that "literature and the performing arts have rarely addressed the challenges of mothering and migration together". Robbe attributes this lack of representation to a lack of theorisation, for her, "[i]nterlinking motherhood and migration experiences has been daunting due to the lack of a critical language in which to address migration and motherhood together, as such language would inevitably challenge the gendered imaginations of voice and mobility" (498). On a closely related point, Irene Gedalof examining the under-valuation and under-theorisation of the intricacies that mark the experience of migrant motherhood argues that "we are only hearing Odysseus' narrative of agency–still making the hero(ine) of migration narratives the uprooted, dislocated and solo

[13] For an elaborated discussion of this stereotypical representation of the "Third World" woman's migrant identity construction in migrant women's writing, check Al Khateeb.

actor remaking her identity in a new world" (97). This means that migrant mothers are under-represented both in literature and scholarship.

By offering maternal narrative in which the mother is a subject, the novels that I analyse part ways with "daughter-centric" narratives where the mother's voice is silenced, and where she is marginalised. In migrant "daughter-centred" texts, the focus is automatically on the daughters' journey towards achieving migrant subjectivity. Mothers in migrant versions of such texts are often represented as "upholding the culture and traditions of the home country" (Heffernan and Wilgus10-11). This means that the mother has a predetermined identity and role. By upholding the culture and traditions of the country of origin/heritage, the mother is consequently presented as the migrant daughter's obstacle towards subjectivity, individuality, and modernity–modernity is often constructed in contrast to the backwardness of the traditionalism personified in the mother. This vision is the one discussed above which is found in the texts that Abudi analyses, Ali's *Brick Lane* and Aslam's *Maps* among others. Regarding migrant narratives told from the mother's point of view, Eglė Kačkutė poses a very crucial question. In her article "Mothering Across Languages and Cultures in Ying Chen's Letters to her Children" addressing the representation of Chinese motherhood in Canada, she enquires as to "how a migrant mother ensures her children's sense of belonging in a culture and language to which she does not fully belong herself" (4). It is the focus on the mothers' migrant subjectivity which has been marginalised in literature and theory that motivates my choice of the novels in question.

The choice of the novels is also motivated by their portrayal of mother figures who neither reinscribe patriarchal motherhood which deprives mothers of their sense of agency and their subjectivity, nor do they completely reject motherhood or emphasise only its negative aspects. For instance, Sammar expresses both hate and love towards her son Amir. She once "pinche[s] him hard when no one was looking" (8). Grieving the death of her

husband, she tells Amir "I wish it was you instead. I hate you. I hate you" (7). These scenes of hate and abuse are juxtaposed with other scenes where Sammar expresses love of her son. The narrator says that: "[s]he fell in love with Amir again" (159) when she meets him after four years of renunciation and inability to mother him (7). The other two novels also portray maternal ambivalence, and negative and positive feelings towards motherhood which complicates the representation of motherhood. Nalini expresses negative feelings about her pregnancy. Pregnant with her first child Satchin, she says, "[a]s I grew bigger, so did my insecurities . . . I felt so alone and despite being seven months pregnant, I was desperately empty inside" (71-2). Nalini describes her state after giving birth to Satchin, her son, as being "Defeated and exhausted" (73). Nalini who previously felts "defeated and exhausted", delivering her second child, Maya, she says: "I never thought it was possible to feel such love for my baby. You think that your heart won't expand to love another so, that there is no more room, but it does and it does so effortlessly" (78). In *A Golden Age*, Rehana, like Sammar and Nalini, manifests a complex experience of motherhood. Rehana who would sacrifice her life for her daughter, also finds it hard to love her, the narrator says: "[s]he had a blunt, tired love for her daughter. It was full of effort" (75). In another instance, talking to her daughter about the year in which she and Sohail were taken by Faiz and separated from her, Rehana tells Maya: "I would have given anything–my life—" (245) to gain them back.

Since the three texts are concerned with the representation of migrant women from the "Third World", my examination of the three narratives will revolve around the study of the ways in which the three of them construct complex migrant and maternal subjectivities. The examination of the novels demonstrates how the novels reclaim the lost maternal voice, present complex maternal and migrant subjectivities, and challenge simplistic representation of women and mothers of "Third World" heritage. To reach these goals, the thesis draws insights from different branches of theory, such as feminism and postcolonialism, using a

number of concepts and ideas, including matrifocality and matrilineality, nostalgia and homesickness, mimicry, Orient, and "the Victim-Escapee stereotype" to give depth to my reading of the novels as will be seen shortly in the division of chapters.

Division of chapters

Chapter One: Challenging "the Victim-Escapee Stereotype" in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*

This chapter offers an examination of Aboulela's *The Translator* as a text that "writes back" to simplistic representations of Arab/Muslim women, mothers, and female migrants[14]. I draw the parallel between *The Translator* and a text that is regarded a source of influence for Aboulela's narrative: Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. The intertextuality between *The Translator* and the Sudanese British writer Salih's *Season* is of paramount importance to the current discussion. In this chapter, I layout the ways in which Salih's narrative influenced the construction of Sammar's character as a migrant parent and a widow. I also draw the link between the author's own experience as a migrant mother, which she discusses in interviews and semi-autobiographical works, and Sammar as a migrant character. I address the novel's portrayal of the challenges and the struggles of being a migrant mother. By later laying out the similarities between Salih's construction of the figure of the widow,

[14] I use the term to "write back" to refer to the subversive tendency in Aboulela's text, as well as in the other two main texts that I analyse. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. use the term "writing back" to refer to postcolonial literature produced by writers from countries previously colonised by European powers. Ashcroft et. al explain that to write back does not mean to write "'for' the centre, but 'back' in the sense of 'against' the assumptions of the centre to a prior claim to legitimacy and power" (Ashcroft et al. 245n2). My use of the term "writing back" involves but is not limited to countering canonical discourses which Ashcroft et. al discuss in their book. As it becomes clear so far, and as the following chapters will further illuminate, by writing back in this thesis, I mean challenging stereotypes about women of "Third World" origin/heritage whether they are spread by Western or non-Western writers and discourses.

Hosna bint Mahmood, and Sammar, I examine *The Translator*'s representation of patriarchal expectations on widowed mothers.

Before I analyse *The Translator*'s problematisation of the representation of Arab/Muslim motherhood and the character of the Arab/Muslim mother, I start by first revealing the dominant simplistic view of Arab/Muslim mothers which frequently features in texts by writers of Arab/Muslim heritage. I choose the following texts as examples that replicate dominant simplistic constructions of Arab/Muslim mothers and their societies: Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003), Nadjet el Hachmi's *The Last Patriarch* (2010), Malika Mokeddem's *The Forbidden Woman* (1998) and Nina Bouraoui's *Forbidden Vision* (1995). The analysis of the figure of the mother in these four texts shows that although these novels are by authors of different ethnic backgrounds, there is a common thread among them which is the negative and simplistic depiction of the mother. To explain the stereotypes that prevail in the four texts, I draw on Mohja Kahf's series of stereotypes that she identifies in reductionist writings about Muslim women. Among these stereotypes are those of the "meek mother" and the "cruel country", two of the clichés that constitute what Kahf calls the stereotype of "the Victim-Escapee narrative" ("The Pity Committee"). I argue that in the four texts above, the mother embodies the role of the victim of patriarchy, while the daughter personifies the character of the escapee who refuses the fate of her subjugated mother. My discussion then will be centred on the study of *The Translator*'s challenge of simplistic rendering of Arab/Muslim mothers and their experience of motherhood.

To highlight the novel's complex portrayal of the maternal, I study its representation of maternal ambivalence and transnational mothering. These two aspects of Sammar's experience of motherhood are studied as a reflection of the novel's ability to bring forward an image that neither idealises nor repudiates motherhood. These two aspects of motherhood are studied as ways used by the writers to counter simplistic representations and silences of

maternal figures. To theorise the novel's representation of maternal ambivalence and its subversive potential, I build on psychotherapist, writer, and feminist Rozsika Parker's and psychoanalyst Barbara Almond's insights about maternal ambivalence. Both scholars argue for the normalcy of maternal ambivalence and condemn the societal treatment of maternal ambivalence as taboo. The chapter discusses the representation of maternal ambivalence in Western literature which as Ivana Brown argues is mostly caused by societal patriarchal expectations towards mothers and their suffering from lack of support in their mothering (125-6). In relation to that, I argue that in *The Translator*, like in many Western literary works, patriarchal motherhood and its expectations on mothers appear as a reason for Sammar's maternal ambivalence. However, Sammar's ambivalence is not a result of lack of support, on the contrary, mothering in *The Translator* is shared between female members of the family. Sammar's ambivalence is a result of many issues among which is patriarchy, specifically, Sammar's mother-in-law's denial of her desire to marry after the death of her husband. This is the patriarchal norm which Sammar rejects by migrating to Scotland and becoming a transnational mother. I, therefore, argue that the novel's acknowledgement of patriarchy, of patriarchal motherhood, and the representation of their effect on Sammar's experience of mothering reflects a sense of complexity overshadowed in reductionist representations of both Arab/Muslim societies and of Arab/Muslim women's position in the family. This complexity owes to the fact that Aboulela does not reduce Sudan, its culture and traditions, and the Sudanese family to one aspect–patriarchy. It rather presents a balanced and complex Sudanese family life where women are diverse in their character and social roles and are a great source of support in each other's mothering. The chapter also addresses other aspects of Sammar's life that intensify her maternal ambivalence. The representation of an experience of motherhood that is affected by a number of aspects further complicates the image of the Arab/Muslim mother and motherhood. Sammar's grief, her

homesickness/nostalgia, and fear of bringing up her son in a foreign country are all aspects of Sammar's life that have negatively affected her relationship with her son.

Resisting representations of migrant women, and in particular mothers, as "passive recipients and reproducers of an externally defined 'culture'" (Newns, *At Home* 12), *The Translator* presents a nuanced account of the experiences of motherhood and migration. Therefore, I examine the narrative's complication of the protagonist's sense of belonging using Roberta Rubenstein's distinction between homesickness and nostalgia. According to Rubenstein, homesickness is "a spatial/geographical separation", while nostalgia is "a temporal one" (4). I argue that Sammar's sense of belonging fluctuates between a strong feeling of attachment to a physical home–Sudan during the first years of her migration–to later feeling at home when she is with her lover, later husband, Rae. I use Rubenstein's distinction to address the novel's nuanced account of Sammar's migratory journey which counters simplistic representations of female "Third World" women's experience of migration. In *The Translator*, Sammar's subjectivity is not achieved through detaching from the country of origin and embracing "Western" values, this means that *The Translator* does not conform to a trope of migrant writing in which such values are idealised. I argue that although the novel portrays a sense of belonging that departs from the migrant character's attachment to a physical homeland, the migratory journey does not entail a complete severance of ties with Sudan. The home country is also not presented stereotypically as essentially patriarchal. And so, it does not undermine the importance of Sammar's attachment to Sudan in her maternal and migrant subjectivities.

In brief, the chapter focuses on the study of *The Translator*'s construction of complex maternal and migrant subjectivities which counter reductionist, one-dimensional representations of Arab/Muslim women, female migrants, and mothers. To do so, I focus on the study of the novel's construction of Sammar's complex migrant journey and a changing

sense of belonging. In relation to this, I study Sammar's complex relationship with Sudan and the novel's departure from reductionist and demonising representations of "Third World" countries which dominate many migrant literary narratives. I also examine the complexity of the representation of motherhood between patriarchal expectations and subversive potentials through addressing maternal ambivalence and transnational mothering. The analysis of motherhood in *The Translator* illustrates the novel's depiction of an image of the mother that is neither idealistic nor denigrating.

Chapter Two: Celebrating Cooking and Matrilineage in Preethi Nair's *One Hundred Shades of White*

As in chapter one, chapter two is concerned with the examination of the representation of migrant and maternal subjectivities, this time in Nair's *One Hundred*. In its endeavour to resist clichéd images of the victim oppressed mother who lacks subjectivity, the novel brings to the fore the story of a mother's experience of motherhood and migration. In this chapter, I argue that *One Hundred* presents a complex story of motherhood and migration through giving prominence to the mother's own narrative voice along with that of her daughter, Maya. This dual narrative, I maintain, promotes intersubjectivity and stresses the importance of belonging to a female lineage for both Nalini and her daughter. Matrilineage thus becomes one of the main themes that I analyse in this chapter. It is presented as the characters' link with the country of origin/heritage, and it symbolises their relationship with their cultural heritage. Having a strong relationship with female ancestors which symbolises a strong relationship with the ancestral country and heritage challenges stereotypical representations of the experience of migration where female migrant characters must sever all ties with their country of origin/heritage to emerge as agents and subjects. For instance,

Nalini's and Maya's agency, subjectivity, and self-fulfilment are achieved through maintaining ties with their female ancestors' heritage symbolised mainly in cooking; a skill often associated with women's domesticity.

Another crucial role of matrilineage that I examine in the chapter is its support of Nalini as a mother in times of weakness and doubt. I first argue that the fact that the novel delineates, side by side with Nalini's love for her children, her weaknesses, doubt, and need for support suggests that the view of motherhood that the text represents is "well-balanced". Second, I contend being part of a strong and highly complex matrilineal line helps Nalini in her mothering in many ways. Ammu, Nalini's mother's assistance of her daughter in her role as a mother both physically, before Nalini migrates to England, and through remembering her words in times of need when Nalini is in England, is an indicator of Nalini's need for assistance and it also highlights the importance of a mother for a daughter who is herself a mother. The other sources of support for Nalini in her experience as a mother are the young Ammu, Nalini's younger daughter who she names after her mother, and Maggie Nalini's Irish friend who becomes an "othermother" to Maya[15]. They both help Nalini to reconcile with her daughter who Nalini finds it "impossible to get through to her" (118). The matrilineal line is further complicated by Nalini's mother's position in India, and Maggie's Irish origin and the fact that the latter is not connected to Nalini's family by blood. These characteristics make the matrilineal line in *One Hundred* transnational and transcultural.

The chapter addresses the empowering potential of cooking and of the problematisation of maternal devotion–both often considered as "traditional" and "feminine" ideals of womanhood and motherhood–in *One Hundred*. As I explained earlier, one of the

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[15] Simone A. James Alexander defines the concept of the "othermother" in her book *Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women*. Alexander refers to the character of the othermother as someone who steps in in "times of need and crisis", by crisis she means disruption in the mother-daughter relationship. She also claims that the othermother helps and supports the daughter who feels alienated (7).

aspects of maternal devotion that the text problematises is the notion of self-sacrifice. Normally thought of as "uncritically embody[ing]" patriarchy (Ann Kaplan 124), self-sacrifice is presented as a source of success to both Nalini and her mother. Similarly, cooking is often perceived as a "feminine" task associated with the domestic which implies passivity or imprisonment. In this novel, it is portrayed as a heritage of female ancestors passed on from generation to generation and is central to the development of all events in the novel. I, therefore, investigate the representation of cooking, food, and the kitchen as symbols of migrant characters' relationship with India or Britain and as symbols of the conflict and the reconciliation between Nalini, who wants to maintain a strong relationship with India, and her children, who aspire to be "British". The importance that is given to these "domestic" practices and spaces, as Newns asserts, "challenge[s] the devaluation of the private sphere as a static, unproductive and uncreative space" (*At Home* 12). I also argue that this subversive representation of domestic spaces and practices disrupts the division of public/domestic spheres. One of the ways in which this division between public and private spheres is blurred is when Nalini starts a pickle business inside her house. This small business becomes her source of income which grants her financial independence and sense of realisation. Her home business later develops, and she opens a pickle shop.

To study the mother-child conflicts, and more thoroughly mother-daughter conflicts, in the novel which are symbolised in negotiations of different culinary practices, I draw on postcolonial theorist and literary critic Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of "mimicry" and "hybridity". His two concepts are relevant in that they explain the conflict between British cuisine and its Indian counterpart which in the novel symbolises the relationship between dominant British and minority Indian "cultures". Bhabha's mimicry is about the desire of colonial powers to make the Indian subject "Anglicized", which means creating a subject that is "*almost the same, but not quite*" (emphasis in the original 89). For the colonial powers this

gives them authority over and the ability to control these Anglicised subjects. However, as Bhabha argues, these subjects are actually threatening to the colonial powers since mimicry–which results in a disturbed imitation of the coloniser–menaces the purity of the coloniser's race, culture, and history (88). I argue, in line with Bhabha's theorisation of mimicry, that the conflict between Nalini and her children, which is resolved in her "submission" to their request of cooking British food, is symbolic of their migrant identities. I demonstrate how Nalini's fusion of culinary practices of both cultures symbolises her "hybrid" identity.

To sum up, this chapter aims to show the complexity of Nair's representation of the experiences of motherhood and migration of her migrant figure Nalini. The chapter argues that the complexity of both experiences defies reductionist stereotypes of the Indian woman and mother as oppressed and victim. The novel also, like *The Translator*, subverts reductionist stereotypical portrayals of Indian women migrants as reproducers of patriarchy or as assimilationist characters who demonise the country of origin in favour of the one that they migrate to as is the case in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*.

Chapter Three: Problematising the Figure of the Mother As/in Nation in Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age*

This chapter is centred on the investigation of the representation of the maternal figure in *A Golden Age*; a text about war and nationalism. I will address how in discourses and narratives of nationalism, the mother usually occupies the metaphoric realm. Patriarchal representations of mothers in narratives of nationalism often feature a male hero and a metaphoric female character. The chapter will discuss how Anam negotiates the tropes of the mother as a nation and the mother in the nation that dominate what Elleke Boehmer calls "the grand narrative of historical nationalist literature told by male writers" (100). In this chapter,

I show that in responding to “grand narratives” of the nation which tend to objectify the figure of the woman/mother, Anam does not completely reject the metaphorisation of the mother and her embrace of the domestic which can be considered tropes that prevail in these masculinist narratives. To study Anam’s engagement with the tropes of nationalism I draw on the concepts of “literalisation” and “ironisation” as they are discussed by Elleke Boehmer in her study of women’s writing of the nation and how these writers interact in their texts with tropes that are linked with the typical imagination of the woman in nationalist discourses. By literalisation, I mean the novel’s portrayal of Rehana as both a metaphoric and an ordinary mother. This can be considered a response but not a rejection of the metaphorisation of motherhood per se. As for the ironisation of the gendered tropes of the nation, I mean the novel’s nuanced engagement with, for instance, the idea of Rehana’s reluctant nationalism. Being a metaphoric mother of the nation and even standing for the newly forming nation itself, typically, Rehana should be a “true” nationalist; having a strong sense of nationalism. By presenting such an essential element of the trope of the metaphoric mother as dubious, Anam is able to ironise the trope of the symbolic mother and its idolism. Through literalising and ironising these tropes, Anam problematises both the patriarchal imagination of the metaphoric mother and domestic spaces which tends to idealise them, and some feminist writing which completely reject them for their association with patriarchy.

The study of the literal representation of motherhood in *A Golden Age* reveals that the text offers a significant contribution to the growing literature on motherhood. Specifically, *A Golden Age* contributes to the effort of other migrant writers who are reclaiming the lost voice of the migrant maternal figure. In many literary texts by migrant writers, the representation of the character of the mother reinforces the old and “recycled”, to use Nash’s term once more, stereotype of the oppressed, backwards, and passive “Third World” woman. In these narratives, the mother often features as an object rather than a subject in her own

right; the narratives are usually narrated from a migrant child's perspective. Since this thesis is concerned with the representation of motherhood in female migrant narratives, I am interested mainly in how *A Golden Age* responds to the image of the mother that usually features in "daughter-centric" migrant texts. Anam presents a complex maternal figure with a complex experience of motherhood and migration to counter simplistic imaginations of the mother as a victim and/or perpetuator of patriarchy that a lot of the time prevails migrant daughters' literary texts. I highlight the novel's attention to the day-to-day domestic routines of the mother that are sometimes represented as passive, meaningless, or even oppressive acts. I highlight the text's subversion of "the normative reading of the im/migrant domestic home as a purely regressive, 'traditional' space that must be rejected/escaped from" (Newns, *At Home* 12-3). I will also focus on the text's problematisation of maternal love through its representation of maternal ambivalence. This, however, as I have argued in the previous chapters does not necessarily entail a focus only on the negative aspects of maternal ambivalence. I rather argue that the text reclaims certain aspects of motherhood like love, devotion, and care from their association with patriarchal expectations about mothers.

Regarding the complex migrant experience and identity that the text puts forward, I argue that it serves to challenge both the exclusion of migrant subjectivities from mainstream nationalist discourses and the reductionist portrayals of migrant mothers of many "daughter-centric" texts. I will demonstrate how by presenting a complex journey of searching for "home", the novel challenges the fixed identity that is usually attributed to the migrant mother who, as I discussed above, maintains a strong attachment to her culture of origin which is a lot of the time portrayed as being patriarchal and oppressive to women.

Chapter One: Challenging "the Victim-Escapee Stereotype" in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*

Introduction

This chapter examines the ways in which Leila Aboulela complicates the representation of motherhood, migration, and mothering in migration. Throughout the sections of this chapter, *The Translator* will be analyzed as a text that resists stereotypes and adds nuance to the existing simplistic representations of Arab/Muslim women in general and more specifically mothers. The character of the Arab/Muslim mother in works such as the Lebanese American Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003), the Moroccan Spanish Nadjet el Hachmi's *The Last Patriarch* (2010), the Algerian French Malika Mokeddem's *The Forbidden Woman* (1998) and Nina Bouraoui's *Forbidden Vision* (1995) is associated with tradition and or religion which, in these novels as in many others, are often equated explicitly or implicitly with backwardness, patriarchy, and women's oppression. The point of view in these texts is that of a daughter who is highly critical of the seemingly patriarchal Arab/Muslim culture and people as well as of her own mother and other women/mothers who she deems agents and/or victims of Arab/Muslim misogyny. I argue that these texts reinscribe stereotypes about "Third World" countries and women through their reductionist rendering of the character of the victimised mother and her daughter who aspires for a fate different than that of her mother and the other women in her milieu. I address these texts in this chapter to highlight the recurence of the same stereotypes about Arab/Muslim mothers. Through presenting a bief examination of these four texts, I show that it is very frequent for the Arab/Muslim mother to be depicted as a victim/agent of Arab/Muslim patriarchy and bigorty and that to break away from her life of servitude she, must denounce her religion and the

traditions of her ethnic culture; often considered the sources of her oppression. In *The Translator*, Aboulela resists representations that propagate a monolithic image of Arab/Muslim women and mothers. She produces a narrative that centres around an Arab/Muslim migrant mother who does not conform to reductionist imaginations. Aboulela's work, I argue, unveils the failure of some texts by Arab/Muslim writers to account for the diversity of Arab/Muslim women's experiences of motherhood and migration by disrupting the image of the oppressed/authoritative mother who is presented as a hindrance to her daughter's subjectivity and self-fulfilment.

As I explained in the thesis introduction, the story of the mother, in literary texts as well as in scholarship, has for long been dominated by that of the daughter. The current chapter aims at examining the narrative of motherhood from the perspective of the mother in Aboulela's *The Translator*–a novel centred on and narrated from the point of view of a migrant mother called Sammar. The analysis in this chapter traces the text's shift of focus from the representation of migrant daughters' identity construction, which often depends on the daughter's distance from or repudiation of her mother, to the portrayal of a migrant mother's complex migrant identity and her quest of self-fulfilment and subjectivity–themes that are quite often simplistically portrayed. The mother who features in certain texts by migrant women writers and that are narrated from daughters' point of view is either a migrant woman herself, a mother of a migrant daughter, or a mother who lives with her "rebellious" daughter in their country of birth. In this chapter, I discuss, through examining the image of the mother that prevails in the texts mentioned above, the fact that regardless of her location, being at "home" or in the West, the mother almost always embodies the character of the selfless woman, the oppressed, the woman who is abused by her father and/or husband, and the woman who uncritically embraces what is presented as patriarchal culture and traditions. In many cases, such as in Bouraoui's and Halaby's novels, this oppressed and silent mother

forcibly transmits the patriarchal lifestyle that she is victim of to her daughter. This "cruel" attitude of the mother leaves no room for the rebellious daughter except for rejecting both the mother and the misogynistic culture and traditions which the mother manifests.

Absence of a maternal voice and the replicated image of the "trapped" and victimised mother which characterise what can be considered a dominant trend of writing in texts by writers of Arab/Muslim heritage is what makes *The Translator* stand out as a migrant literary text that narrates a female character's migrant experience. The chapter focuses on the study of Sammar, a migrant mother who does not conform either to patriarchal expectations of motherhood or to the stereotypical image of the Arab/Muslim mother that is found in certain literary texts about Arab/Muslim women as well is in some feminist studies about them such as in Susan Moller Okin's essay "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?". To examine Sammar's character as a complex Arab/Muslim migrant mother, I focus my analysis on three major aspects of Sammar's life: her mothering, her sense of (un)belonging, and her relationship with Islam and the culture and traditions of Sudan.

Discussing *The Translator*'s depiction of a complex Arab/Muslim maternal character that subverts simplistic accounts about Arab/Muslim (migrant) motherhood, I begin by highlighting the text's problematization of motherhood and the figure of the mother. In the texts that I mentioned above by Halaby, Bouraoui, Mokeddem, and El Hachmi, the negative feelings manifested by many mothers towards their daughters are a result of the mothers' internalisation of patriarchal ideas about femininity, wifehood, and motherhood. This means that the maternal ambivalence that these mothers display is instigated by patriarchy. While in *The Translator*, patriarchy also features as a reason for Sammar's feelings of ambivalence, it is not the only trigger, and her fraught relationship with her son is seen through a completely different lens. In daughters' narratives, patriarchy causes rupture or distance in the relationship between the mother and her daughter because the mother's re-inscription of

patriarchal ideas come in the face of the daughters' quest for self-fulfilment. In *The Translator*, patriarchy is one of the reasons for the rupture in the mother-child's relationship not because Sammar reinscribes misogyny but rather because she challenges it through reclaiming her own personal desires as a woman. I will address Aboulela's depiction of a transnational mother's pursuit of self-fulfilment–which is expressed in her desire to get married very soon after her husband's death. This desire in itself contests patriarchal expectations about widowed mothers. Maternal ambivalence is further complicated by Sammar's grief, after the death of her husband Tarig, and also by her desire to shield her son from the racism and the alienation that she witnesses as a migrant. All these factors along with Sammar's feelings of inadequacy as a mother, which stem from societal unrealistic expectations on mothers, lead Sammar to be unresponsive towards her son and to eventually leave him back in Sudan to travel on her own to Scotland. The fact that Sammar's maternal feelings and attitudes are affected by a number of factors challenges the easy association between Arab/Muslim mothers and their internalisation of patriarchal cultures. I argue that the nuanced depiction of the mother in Aboulela's text could be considered both a subversion of patriarchal expectations about and construction of widowed motherhood and a form of "writing back" to what can be considered Orientalist representations of Arab/Muslim women and mothers by writers and academics of Western as well as Arab/Muslim origin/heritage.

In examining *The Translator* as a text that "writes back" to the representation of the mother as an oppressed and silent woman, it is crucial to address the depiction of the Arab/Muslim family since it is often portrayed as a source of women's oppression. In tackling this idea of the Arab/Muslim family as a patriarchal unit, I turn to Joseph Suad's discussion of the construction of female subjectivity between individualistic and intersubjective models of being. I argue that writing about Arab/Muslim women and families which "exposes" patriarchy–supposedly a hallmark of the Arab/Muslim family–while

informative on the existence of patriarchy within Arab/Muslim societies, remains limited and reductionist since it does not acknowledge the intricacies and specificities of kinship relations and the dynamics of family relations.

After discussing *The Translator*'s complex depiction of Sammar's relationship with her own family, even with Mahasen her mother-in-law–who embodies the role of the patriarch–I move to the discussion of Sammar's intricate relationship with the culture and traditions of Sudan and with Islam and its teachings especially those related to the regulation of man/women relationships. I argue that Sammar's embrace of her Islamic faith and its ideals related to gender, which is seen by Waïl Hassan as a sign of passivity and regression (197), is in fact a source of empowerment and subjectivity for Sammar. I demonstrate that Sammar's insistence on her right to get married after the death of Tarig against Mahasen's will is a sign of agency. Moreover, her adherence to her faith by refusing to engage in a relationship with Rae before he embraces Islam and before they are married is an indication of subjectivity and agency. Unlike other characters in some texts by writers of Arab/Muslim heritage whose agency and subjectivity cannot be achieved unless they denounce Islam and rid themselves of their Arab/Muslim heritage and/or families, Sammar's agency and subjectivity are not a result of embracing liberal values, they are rather cultivated through embracing her cultural heritage while denouncing patriarchal expectations and norms, and embracing her Islamic belief. It is true that Sammar is critical of patriarchy, but she does not reduce the complexity of her culture and society. She acknowledges the richness of the culture and its traditions which is evident in her contentment with the busy life she experiences when she is in Sudan.

The final section in this chapter focuses on the mother figure's migrant identity and its complexity. Narratives that are written from the child's perspective feature a maternal character whose role is to transmit or force the "regressive" culture and traditions of her

country of origin to her children. The mother's own migrant identity is not at the forefront of these narratives. In *The Translator*, however, Sammar's migrant identity is at the centre of the story. The stereotype of the mother as a "carrier of tradition" which often alludes to her embodiment of backwardness is unsettled in Aboulela's text through Sammar's changing sense of belonging. Sammar's sense of "home" is problematised, at the start of the narrative, Sudan is what home is for Sammar. This straightforward meaning is troubled after her visit to Sudan to attend Tarig's funeral. Tarig's absence disturbs Sammar's association between feeling at home and a geographical space. Thus, home becomes associated with being loved and in love rather than being a geographical space. The argument in this section is that in *The Translator*, Sammar's sense of belonging shifts from being an attachment to a geographical space, Sudan, to being a sense of longing for a time that is marked by love. Roberta Rubenstein's distinction between homesickness and nostalgia will be utilised to explain the shift in Sammar's sense "home" and belonging.

By digging deep into the experiences of motherhood and migration, this chapter contributes to the overall argument of the thesis which is the study of texts that subvert simplistic and stereotypical representations of migrant motherhood. It will present motherhood as a very complex experience rather than as a static identity characterised by oppression and lack of subjectivity. A rather general contribution of this chapter is its

participation in the growing discussion of maternal narratives that revolve around the mother and her own identity and desires, and which reclaim maternal subjectivities.

Before I engage with the close reading of the novel, I will provide a short background on Aboulela as well as a review of some critical reflections on the text.

1. Background About the Author and the Novel

Leila Fuad Aboulela was born in Cairo in 1964. When she was six weeks old, her Egyptian mother and Sudanese father moved to Khartoum. (Aboulela Blog). This movement marks the beginning of Aboulela's journey as a migrant woman which has greatly influenced her writing including her debut novel *The Translator*. In an autobiographical essay entitled "Moving Away from Accuracy", Aboulela states that, "[i]n the greyness of culture shock and bad weather, the writing was there, warm and glowing, a new hope, an opportunity, a way of contact with my past. Walking in Aberdeen, stirring words about another place. Why not? Put homesickness into words, make sense of it, make stories of it" (204).

The Translator (1999) is a migrant narrative of Sammar, a Sudanese widowed mother who works as an Arabic/English translator at the University of Aberdeen. Sammar is born in Scotland and at the age of seven she goes back with her Sudanese parents to live in Sudan. She migrates again to Scotland with her cousin and husband, Tarig, to pursue his medical studies. Tarig dies in a car accident a few years into their marriage. Sammar then goes back to live in Sudan and after a big conflict with her mother-in-law Mahasen for expressing a desire to marry again, Sammar decides to return to Scotland without her son Amir. The novel

ends with Sammar in the process of getting married to her employer Rae Isle, a Scottish professor and scholar of middle eastern studies who converts to Islam.

The novel is studied as a work of romance by critics like Lucinda Newns. Newns reads *The Translator* as an example of a complex Muslim female narrative that could renovate the Western secular romantic tradition through merging feminist issues with Muslim beliefs ("Renegotiating Romantic" 296). Other critics who investigate the novel explore issues that are pertinent to many migrant literary narratives–alienation, homesickness, and the (un)translatability of language, religion, and culture. In her analysis of *The Translator*, Tina Steiner focuses on Sammar's journey from nostalgia to a physical home–Sudan–to her relocation in the West. In her study, Steiner explains that Aboulela portrays female characters who, owing to the transnationality of their religion, shift their belonging from being bound to a geographical location into achieving a sense of belonging to the Muslim community transnationally. Another aspect that critics of *The Translator* address is the idea of translating Islam and the Muslim/Arab culture to the West. In her study of *The Translator*, Nicole Côté questions whether the novel should be considered a "translational text"–one which encourages transformation, or an "ideological novel"–one that resists cultural exchange and promotes conservatism (113). In other words, Côté explores the notions of possibility and/or impossibility of cultural translation and exchange in *The Translator*, concluding that despite embodying instances of both, the text can be read as promoting cultural translation for its representation of cultural dialogue (113-4).

The above are a few examples among the many readings of *The Translator*. The title of the novel itself is very significant and it explains critics' interest in examining themes that are pertinent to migrant literary narratives. The current study is in line with the already-existing body of works in its interest in examining issues related to migrant literature such as

characters' search for home. However, this reading of Aboulela's text departs from others in its analysis of the seldomly investigated portrayal of motherhood.

Aboulela's migrant narratives portray the lives of female Muslim immigrants who to a great extent share similar immigrant experiences with her. She focuses in her writing on the challenges that Muslim women face as migrants in non-Muslim countries. This influence of her personal experience as a migrant woman is highlighted in her blog, Aboulela's writing is praised for "[h]ighlighting the challenges facing Muslims in Europe and 'telling the stories of flawed complex characters who struggle to make choices using Muslim logic'. . . Her personal faith and the move, in her mid-twenties, from Sudan to Scotland are a major influence on her work" (Aboulela Blog).

In an interview with Mohamed Najeeb, Aboulela demonstrates the link between the depiction of migrant motherhood in *The Translation* and her interest in revealing the struggles Arab/Muslim women face when raising children in the West:

> At [*sic*] my early days in England I became aware about the challenges that face an Arab-Moslem woman living in a Western society and who has a responsibility to bring up her children in such a society. I began to feel the problems and anxieties that surround such women and to ask questions about the problems that face Moslems in those societies. (Aboulela, "Writer Leila Aboulela")

In another interview with Fatima Suleiman and Leena Al-Samani, Aboulela sheds light on the importance of depicting the impact of migration on the identity of migrant children, family relationships, and on migrant's mental health because these themes were obscured "or at least, brushed aside". Aboulela also explains that the West's conception of Arab culture

and assimilation frustrations were also “overlooked”. To her, fiction offers her a “space” to address these compelling themes (“Exclusive Interview”).

One could, hence, argue that Sammar is a representation of what Aboulela considers challenges that face Muslim women and mothers in the West, particularly in Britain. However, Aboulela’s construction of a migrant mother is not only inspired by her own experience as a migrant parent and by the struggles of other Arab/Muslim migrant mothers around her, it is also motivated by the character of the migrant parent in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1991)–Mustafa. Salih’s *Season* is a significant source of inspiration for Aboulela’s *The Translator*. The two texts are parallel in their representation of different topics in relation to migrant parenting, and to patriarchy, particularly their depiction of widowed mothers. Despite *Season* being “a highly masculine book” (Aboulela, “An Interview with Leila Aboulela” 96), as Aboulela argues in her interview with Claire Chambers, its portrayal of a widowed mother who challenges patriarchal domination might well have inspired Aboulela’s representation of Sammar in her challenge of patriarchal domination of widows’ lives.

The parallel between *Season* and *The Translator* in terms of the challenges that face Arab/Muslim migrant parents lies in the novels two protagonists’ speculation about their children’s desire to migrate to the West; a desire that both parents–Mustafa in *Season* and Sammar–consider dangerous. Mustafa’s migratory experience ends with his sentence to seven years in prison for murdering his English wife. As a Sudanese migrant father, who eventually returns home from England, Mustafa wants his children to live in Sudan and to grow up free from the desire to migrate. Before his death, Mustafa entrusts his friend, the narrator, to take care of his family in a letter in which he says: “do your best to spare them [his children] the pangs of wanderlust and help them have a normal up-bringing” (65).

Mustafa wants his children to "grow up imbued with the air of this village, its smells and colours and history, the faces of its inhabitants and the memories of its floods and harvestings and sowings" (66). What can be considered the most powerful of Mustafa's revelations about his children is when he says, "[h]ow sad it would be if either or both of my sons grew up with the germ of this infection in them, the wanderlust" (67). This revealing letter suggests that Mustafa's intense fear stems from his own dilemma as a black, Arab, Muslim migrant who experienced racism, alienation and a sense of inferiority back in England, and who is a "stranger" in his own country upon return; Mustafa is on various occasions in the novel referred to as "stranger" by the villagers of Wad Hamid where he resides after returning from England. Failing to reconcile these two conflicting states of mind, Mustafa perceives the desire to migrate a "germ" of an "infection". These extracts from Mustafa's letter to the narrator indicate Mustafa's wish to protect his sons from the feelings of dislocation that he suffers from as a migrant. Migrant parent's fear for one's child's wellbeing is also expressed by Sammar in *The Translator*. I will discuss Sammar's desire to protect her son Amir from the feelings of alienation and the pain that racism causes later when I address the reasons of her maternal ambivalence.

Another very important aspects about the parallels that exist between both texts is their "writing back" to Orientalist stereotypes about Arab/Muslim people and their societies. *The Translator* can be considered a continuation of and a "writing back" to Salih's writing tradition. Chambers argues that Salih, along with other writers of Muslim heritage writing in the 1950s and 1960s, "explore images and ideas that continue to circulate in the representation of Muslim-heritage writers from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (*Britain Through Muslim Eyes* 188). This can be said to be true for Aboulela who, like Salih, challenges racism and "writes back" to stereotypes. But unlike him, Aboulela writes from the point of view of a religiously devoted female migrant character. Bringing to

the fore the female religious point of view is what makes *The Translator* a "writing back" to *Season*[16]. Roxanne Bibizadeh's analysis of *The Translator*'s "writing back" highlights the role that Sammar's Islamic faith plays in achieving her subjectivity (74). By "feminising" and "Islamicizing" the narrative of "writing back", Aboulela challenges two discourses that marginalise women; patriarchal interpretation of Islam and Orientalist representation of Muslim women (Bibizadeh 73-4)[17] both of which are reductive concerning their conception of women. Bibizadeh explains that Aboulela disrupts stereotypes against Muslim women through breaking away from "conventional" writing practices and through certain decisions that her character Sammar makes to challenge patriarchal expectations of her society and Western reductive imagination of the Muslim woman as silent and oppressed. She contends that in her depiction of an empowered character who is in control of her body and sexuality, Aboulela's writing, which does not depict sexual experiences of her characters, challenges "conventional feminist discourse of writing about the eroticised female body" (78). Thus, Bibizadeh suggests that Aboulela does not obscure the female experience or deny her protagonist agency by choosing not to reveal Sammar's sexual desires and experiences. Sammar's adherence to her faith by refusing to be in a relationship with Rae unless they are married cannot be considered a sign of passivity and loss of control but rather an indication of agency and subjectivity for it means that it is Sammar who sets the rules for their

[16] Geoffrey Nash asserts that Aboulela "writes back" to classics such as Salih's *Season* and Charlotte Brontë *Jane Eyre* (qtd. in Aboulela, "An Interview with Leila Aboulela" 89). A similar reading, explains Chambers, is offered by John A. Stotesbury who discusses "writing back" in Aboulela's works as an act of reshaping the genre of Western romance by postcolonial Muslim women (89). Brendan Smyth approached this subject of "writing back" from a different angle focusing rather on *The Translator*'s representation of a model of Muslim masculinity that challenges the ones propagated by Orientalists and Islamists (qtd. in Aboulela, "An Interview with Leila Aboulela" 89).

[17] Bibizadeh borrows the term "Islamize" from Geoffrey Nash when he distinguishes Aboulela's postcolonial writing from that of her predecessors like Salih's which was secular (73).

relationship. Sammar's relationship with Rae defies stereotypes about the Arab/Muslim woman's docility and oppression[18].

The brief discussion above illustrates the rich debate that exists in relation to *The Translator*'s subversion of patriarchal and Orientalist stereotypes against Arab/Muslim women. I would like, now, to add another dimension to this rich discussion by considering another crucial element of the "writing back": the novel's portrayal of motherhood. My point of discussion is closely related to Bibizadeh's idea that Sammar's rejection of her maternal role subverts patriarchal and Orientalist stereotype of the passive and self-effacing Muslim woman. However, since Bibizadeh's analysis is not devoted to the discussion of Sammar's experience of motherhood or widowhood it misses some essential details such as the novel's depiction of maternal ambivalence. I want to argue that *The Translator*'s representation of motherhood is far more complex than mere rejection. Sammar does not *simply* reject motherhood, and her fraught relationship with Amir is not disturbed only by patriarchy but because of an array of other reasons like nostalgia, grief, racism, loss of love, *and* patriarchy. By complicating the experience of motherhood as such, Aboulela "writes back" to Orientalist and patriarchal reductive representations, as well as to other Arab/Muslim writers who render the maternal figure in a cliched or–to say the least–in a much less complicated manner than that which *The Translator* offers.

2. The "Meek Mother" and the "Exceptional Escapee" Daughter

Speaking about reductionist and negative images of Arab/Muslim women, it is necessary to indicate that these stereotypes have dominated Western representations since the eighteenth century (Kahf, *Western Representations* 6). In his *Orientalism*, Edward Said

[18] For further reading about how faith empowered Sammar rather than confined her, see Zulfiqar 155-6.

illustrates the Orientalist image that the West has created for Arab or Muslim women long ago. A prominent example that he provides is Gustave Flaubert's description of the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem in the letters that he sent in 1850 to his lover, the French writer and poet Louise Colet, which describe his adventures in Egypt. Said maintains that the Oriental woman for Flaubert is someone who "never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her" (emphasis in original 6). Said's discussion of Flaubert's Orientalist vision of Arab/Muslim women continues to reverberate because this image of the passive and silent Arab and Muslim woman lingers in many literary and scholarly works on Arab and Muslim women to this day as I mentioned in the chapter's introduction.

Before I examine *The Translator*'s nuanced rendition of the maternal through the character of Sammar, it is best to first address what I want to refer to as "the prototypical mother figure" that looms in many works by writers of Arab/Muslim heritage. My brief examination of four novels by Halaby, Mokeddem, Bouraoui, and El Hachmi shows that even though the protagonists are of different cultural backgrounds (Lebanese American, Algerian French, Algerian, Moroccan Spanish) their misery is almost identically depicted in the four texts. This replication of the image of the subordinated Arab/Muslim mother who is victim of her supposedly patriarchal religion and culture is the reason behind my use of these four texts as an illustration for the simplistic manner in which Arab/Muslim mothers are portrayed in many literary texts by writers of Arab/Muslim heritage. My analysis shows that the socio-economic circumstances of the mothers and the political situation of her country of origin or residence often serve as a background, they do not feature as important aspects of these mothers' lives, and most importantly they are not considered as factors behind the mothers' desolation. Lebanese American writer Laila Halaby's novel *West of the Jordan* features many mother figures; some are migrants in the US and others live in Palestine or

Jordan. Regardless of their location, the common point between them are their misery, victimhood, and oppression. Since the events and even the characters in the novel are seen from the cousin daughters' point of view–that of Hala, Soraya, Khadija, and Mawal–the mothers are mostly negatively portrayed. When the mother's relationship with her daughter is brought up, the mother is presented as a hindrance to her daughter's self-fulfilment by enforcing what the daughters consider patriarchal traditions or by imposing an Arab identity on the daughters against their will. Few examples from Halaby's text where daughters reflect on their mothers are for instance Soraya's perception of her mother and all the other women in her family, she says: "I like to have fun, to enjoy myself and to feel good . . . My mother tells me how wrong this is, like it is evil or something and my sister says the same thing. I think they think it's wrong because they don't know what it is to be satisfied, and it scares them. It seems all of the women in our family are like this" (30). In terms of the daughters' migrant dilemma of belonging, Khadija's mother is unresponsive to her daughter's pleads for understanding. When Khadija explains that she considers herself American because she does not even speak Arabic, her mother insists, "No! No daughter of mine is American" (74). This statement indicatess the mother's lack of understanding and her obstruction of any channel communication and bonding with the daughter. The mother wants to have absolute controle over her daughter's identity and desires.

Regarding the mother's own migrant identities, one does not have much access to their migratory journeys. Shahira speaks little English and cannot read it (104). We are told by Khadija that Maysoun, Soraya's mother, "speaks English fine" (150). Dahlia, another mother figure, even felt surprised that she could speak English (100). Although the mothers' migrant subjectivities are not revealed, unlike those of their daughters, these few details about the mothers' command of English and their attitude towards their daughters' desire to be American reveal their refusal of American culture and their preservation of the Arab culture

(whatever these terms mean). The mothers thus embody the schism between the American and the Arab/Muslim cultures. The mother's migrant experience and identity are reduced to a physical passage from the East to the West of a mostly uneducated woman who leads a very unfortunate life where she finds it, as Shahira explains, "very difficult to live with strangers and more difficult when those strangers are your own children" (184).

Hala's mother, Huda, is the only mother figure who is, to some extent, positively introduced by her daughter. But this does not mean that Huda is really different than any other miserable mother figure in the story and very soon into the novel she dies. Hala describes her mother as follows, "[b]etween being physically drained from the miscarriages and her cancer and already being the mother of three children, she was a tired woman when I was born. She was never in good health and always suffered from one thing or another" (7). The image of the mother is that of a tired and "fad[ing]" (8) woman who is worn out because of pregnancies, miscarriages, and cancer. By arguing that the only positive mother figure in Halaby's text is a dead mother, I am reminded of a statement made by Hirsch, which I mentioned in the thesis introduction, in which she says that in nineteenth-century novels "dead or absent mothers are, ironically, the only positive maternal figures we hear about" (47). This means that the negativity that characterised the depiction of mothers from the perspective of daughters back in the nineteenth century continues to feature in contemporary works.

Mawal's story "Crossing" features the last mother figure that I would like to mention, Mawal's neighbour in Palestine, Farah. In fact, I want to argue that her story can be considered the prototype of the stereotypical image of the maternal character which Aboulela unsettles through Sammar's mothering. We are told that at sixteen, Farah is "sent off to live with her new old husband who gave her two children and fists that pounded her with welts to

cover her body, welts she ignored or covered until it broke her father's heart and he convinced her husband to release her with divorce to freedom, but there is no freedom for a divorced woman with two children" (51). The first thing one notices about Farah's story is child marriage and domestic abuse. It is worth noting that very early marriage is a recurrent theme in the text and many characters are forced into marriage at a very young age.

Farah's mechanism to face her traumas and abuse is that "[she] tucked her pain deep inside so that no strip search, no matter how thorough, would ever find it . . . there was no way to change it, just accept God's will and teach yourself rigidity" (49). At the check point as she is searched by the Israeli women guards, "Farah felt nothing as she took off her clothes all the way down to naked, avoiding looking at her body whose loose flesh she rarely inspected, almost as if it belonged to someone else. The women guards poked around with rubber gloves and felt nothing–no anger, nothing more than tiredness" (48-9). Once again, like with the previous mother figures, we have a suffering, helpless, hopeless, and oppressed mother whose body is exhausted from pregnancies and/or beating. Farah appears to have internalised the idea that she must be married and that she must accept any treatment from her husband no matter how inhumane it is. This internalisation leads to her estrangement from her own body where she no longer feels pain, anger, or sadness even in the most humiliating of situations.

These extreme scenes of abuse and submissiveness of the mothers juxtaposed with the daughters' rebellion fit what Mohja Kahf identifies as the three main stereotypical images of Muslim women that shape Western readership's expectations about texts by and about Arab/Muslim women. These images are that of "a victim of gender oppression", that of "an escapee of her intrinsically oppressive culture", and the last stereotype is that of a Muslim woman who is "a pawn of Arab male power" ("Packaging 'Huda'"149). The mothers in *West*

of the Jordan are either victims or pawns of Arab/Muslim male's patriarchy and of the inherently misogynistic Muslim religion and Arab culture, while the daughters, especially Soraya and Hala, are escapees of Arab/Muslim culture's gender injustice. Kahf elaborates elsewhere on the reductionist construction of the Arab/Muslim women where she lists what she calls elements of "the Victim-Escapee stereotype". This stereotype is promoted by what she names the "neo-Orientalist Pity Committee". She explains that "[i]t is not a real committee, but the Orientalism is real, no matter how many people think Said outdated" ("The Pity Committee" 112). Although in her essay Kahf does not refer to works of fiction when she analyses narratives of "the Victim-Escapee stereotype"–she mainly addresses memoirs, scholarly feminist works, and magazines–most of the elements that constitute this stereotypical narrative are found in Halaby's text and the other texts that I will touch upon in the next few pages.

The following are some of the elements that Kahf states in her essay pertaining to the "Victim-Escapee stereotype". The elements of the narrative of the "Pity Committee", which I argue can be circulated by Western or Arab/Muslim media, writers, translators, or feminists, are the "*Mute Marionette*" who is the "Muslim woman [who] is not a speaking subject in her own right but framed within the narrative of the Western giving her a voice", the "*Exceptional Escapee*" who represents " [a] discourse from "authentic voices" of Muslim women", the Muslim woman in this discourse "is constructed as exceptional, a solo act, who against all odds escaped from this brutal culture". Another element is that of the "*Meek Mother*", Kahf explains, "Muslim mother figures are made meek, minimized, or invisible in the Victim-Escapee stereotype" (116). Following the meek mother, we have "*Forbidding Father*". Kahf explains that this is "a cruel male authority figure . . . The Muslim father's motivations are inscrutable, or thoroughly evil". The next element in Kahf's list is "*Rotten Religion*", "[u]biquitously, Western media, and many secular Muslim feminists, take the

word "shariah" (Islamic law) as code for "oppression of women." . . . Islamic terms are mentioned only when they can stand as icons for misogyny". The last element which I want to mention is "*Cruel Country*" which is about the extreme sense of generalisation regarding Muslim countries' attitude towards women. Kahf states that "the Muslim country (any of them, take your pick) [is portrayed] as unmitigatedly woman hating" (Kahf, "The Pity Committee" 117).

The Forbidden Woman and *Forbidden Vision* are two novels by Algerian-French writers Malika Mokeddem and Nina Bouraoui. The word "Forbidden" in both titles prepares the reader for a narrative of a life of censorship. Equally significant is *The Last patriarch*, title in Moroccan-Spanish Najat El Hachmi's text, through which readers would anticipate a narrative of the "victim-Escapee stereotype". Like in Halaby's text, the stereotype of the victim in the three texts is embodied by the mother figure while the character of the daughter delineates the role of the escapee. In *The Forbidden Woman*, Mokeddem's protagonist Sultana is an Algerian migrant woman in France who escapes what is presented in the novel as a patriarchal Algeria. Sultana loses her mother to a fight that the latter has with her husband who thinks his wife is cheating on him (130). Sultana's father simply disappears after killing his wife leaving behind the five-year-old Sultana and her ill sister who dies two days after her mother's burial (131).

Sultana's mother is almost absent from the narrative. In one of the very few instances where she is mentioned, she might be read against the backdrop of what Kahf's calls the "cruel country" which is "unmitigatedly woman hating". One of the village women tells Sultana, who comes back to Algeria as an adult doctor from France, that her mother "'was beautiful and cheerful. That's why she died young. Life here doesn't tolerate cheerfulness, especially in a woman' . . . Another woman says, 'And she knew she was beautiful. She liked

looking at herself. She liked to make herself even more beautiful, and here, that's already The Sin'" (146). The story of Sultana's mother suggests that the fate of women in the Algeria that Mokeddem represents is as miserable as that of the women in Halaby's text, which means that we have the same trope of the unsympathetic and misogynistic Arab/Muslim country. The tragic end of the anonymous mother of Sultana indicates the impossibility of change in the condition of women in their Arab/Muslim communities, for even the woman who takes pleasure in connecting with her own body through for instance beautifying herself is killed by her patriarchal society[19]. Sultana's mother's act of frequently looking at her own self is presented as an act of rebellion against the Algerian society that apparently, like its Jordanian and Palestinian counterparts, teaches and expects its women to lead a life of alienation from their own bodies.

The character of the "meek mother" dominates *The Forbidden Woman*. One shocking story is that of one of Sultana's patients, a mother who "[is] stiff, trembling, and she stutters" because her daughter "was impregnated by her brother . . . when the mother realized her daughter was pregnant, she took her to the north. They came back after the birth, alone. It's said the mother may have killed her daughter's baby. Since then, the girl has become mute" (107). The passage shows that the mother figure that the text presents is prolific, suffering, silent, absent, and submissive to the patriarchy of her father, husband, and sons and who, like the mothers in Halaby's text, acts at times as a "pawn" to her patriarchs like another mother figure who though encourages her daughter Dalila to read, she tells her "obey your brothers.

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[19] I am here saying society and not only her husband because Sultana's father is presented as a husband who used to love his wife and daughter a lot which made him appear as a complete stranger in the village. According to the women who are talking to Sultana about her mother, her father's love towards his wife and daughter (something that was despised the whole community) made the locals jealous and they convinced him that his wife was infidel (146-7).

If you don't, you're not my daughter" (27), knowing that these brothers treat Dalila very badly, they even beat her.

Dalila's brothers along with the other religious men recall another element in Kahf's study, that of "rotten religion" element. Habiba Deming claims that while the religious and bearded characters, like Dalila's brothers, "are not only uniformly mean, they are physically ugly too. The 'good' characters are atheists, or at least secular, and are intelligent, liberal, and handsome like Yacine, the deceased lover, who was even blond" (382). The simplistic binarism between secular/atheist and religious characters indicates that Sultana does not consider socioeconomic conditions as the reason behind these people's problems, she rather believes that "[i]t is their cultural and religious beliefs that are keeping them poor and backward. The assumption is that if they rejected their beliefs and culture as Sultana did (after all she was one of them at one time) they too would become emancipated and modern" (Deming 385).

In the same realm of discussion, Leila Ahmed explains that some feminist works participate in propagating simplistic and shallow conceptions about Arab/Muslim women by perpetuating the monolithic image of the Arab and Muslim culture as oppressive to women. She writes:

> It is disheartening, too, that some feminist scholarly work continues to uncritically reinscribe the old story. Whole books are unfortunately still being published in which . . . the measure of whether Muslim women were liberated or not lay in whether they

> veiled and whether the particular society had become "progressive" and westernized or insisted on clinging to Arab and Islamic ways. (247)

The danger in these simplistic representations and studies about the state of women/mothers in Arab/Muslim societies and communities is that they are often received as truths about the life condition of Arab/Muslim women. Kahf argues that "[t]he Victim-Escapee stereotype appears at every level of culture, pop to high. It is hegemonic, which means it is not seen as a stereotype but as The Truth" ("The Pity Committee" 112). Similarly, concerning Nina Bouraoui's writing, Deming claims that "[a]lmost without exception, novels by Algerian women writers, irrespective of literary worth, are being read as enunciative of a feminist consciousness even when they teem with ambiguities and contradictions" (377). She quotes the librarian and literary critic Jean Déjeux who "warned 'it is certain that a large number of Westerners take at face value what Nina Bouraoui is saying'". Deming adds that Bouraoui's text "presents itself to the reader at once as an allegory (sexual segregation as psychosis) and as an actual depiction of the restrictions imposed on the lives of Muslim women by men and religion" (378). This means that like the previous examples, Bouraoui's *Forbidden Vision* is an example of works by migrant writers who represent simplistic portrayals of Arab/Muslim women and their societies conforming to wide-spread stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims[20].

The manner in which the ills of the misogynistic Algeria are portrayed in *Forbidden Vision* are to a great extent similar to those in Mokeddem's narrative. The difference is that

[20] Exploring Bouraoui's and shortly after El Hachmi's, I will not focus on the texts' representation of "rotten religion", "cruel country", or even "the forbidding father", despite the fact that the texts are imbued with images of all these elements, because I have done so in relation to Halaby's and Mokeddem's texts and these tropes are almost identically replicated in the other texts, I will only point to the two novels' representation of the "meek mother" which automatically brings in the stereotype of the daughter as an "escapee" since both El Hachmi's and Bouraoui's are narrated from a daughter's perspective.

the protagonist in this novel is not a migrant but a daughter character who resides in Algeria. The maternal is very negatively presented, mothers are "pawns" of patriarchal Algerian men. The protagonist Fikria believes that, "[f]rom mother to daughter sadness is a 'jewel' which one can't do without any longer, an inheritance, a congenital illness, transmissible and incurable! Murderous mothers!" (60). This quote suggests that women's sadness is inevitable and that it is mothers who maintain its existence by transmitting it to their daughters, for this, mothers are considered by Fikria "murderous". Mothers are murderous because they metaphorically kill their daughters' desires, their freedom, and any hope they might have for a different existence. Fikria believes that her mother wants her to be "nothing but a belly for reproduction" (102). Once again, Bouraoui like her previously discussed counterparts reinscribes the elements of Kahf's stereotypical narrative of the "victim-escapee".

The last work that I would like to briefly touch upon is Najat El Hachmi's *The Last Patriarch*. Despite being focused on "the patriarch", Mimoun, and his unnamed daughter, *The Last Patriarch* plainly features the figures of the "meek mother" and the "escapee" daughter. It is the narrative of Mimoun Driouch and his family who migrate from the Rif in Morocco to Catania in Spain. The mother's submissiveness to her husband's patriarchal control is captured in one passage in which the daughter encourages her extremely passive mother to go outside of the house since her drunk and patriarchal father is back in Morocco. The mother's objection seems revelatory to the daughter who says: "she'd say no, he's not here but he knows almost everything. It was then I began to understand how much she's been tamed and that bound was perhaps hers for a lifetime" (217). The passage indicates the extreme level of obedience and compliance from the mother's part. The word "tamed" is reminiscent of the idea of the maternal figure's internalisation of patriarchal norms which is also found in all the previously discussed texts. This meekness and surrender to patriarchal control are portrayed in El Hachmi's novel as the central reason for the troubled relationship

that she has with her mother and the distance that exists between them. The daughter eventually rebels against all norms, familial, cultural, and religious through an incestuous relationship with her uncle who is an Islamic studies teacher. This idea that to be liberated one has to denounce one's culture and religion recalls Deming's earlier reading of Sultana, Mokeddem's protagonist, who holds the belief that if her people reject their culture and religion, they will be like her "emancipated and modern".

Among the main conclusions that one draws from the above analysis of the four novels is that the antagonism or at least the ambivalence that the mother manifests towards her daughter is a direct result of the mother's submissiveness to and internalisation of patriarchal norms that are generally mandated by misogynistic Arab culture and Islam. The result of these simplistic accounts is a one-dimensional of motherhood being an institution of patriarchy and of the mother as its victim/agent. The mother's identity is pre-established and is timeless regardless of circumstance. Even migrant mothers are destined to the same fate of subjugation as those who never leave their patriarchal countries. The mother's migrant subjectivity becomes concealed, and she is seen as a hindering force in the face of the daughter's longing for modernity which apparently is the route towards fulfilment and liberation usually attained in one's rejection or demonisation of tradition, culture, and religion.

The main issue with these works is their one-dimensional vision of motherhood and the family. These works highlight issues that women undeniably suffer from, like patriarchy, which undoubtedly exists in Arab/Muslim societies. However, emphasising only this one aspect of the society or the family obscures other aspects, and results in an incomplete representation or vision of both motherhood and the family. This is where *The Translator* stands out as a literary text that resists stereotypes of the oppressed and passive Arab/Muslim mother. Instead of going in line with other female Arab/Muslim writers in their portrayal of

complete rejection of motherhood, tradition, and religion, Aboulela creates a more nuanced maternal figure. In its representation of motherhood and the Arab/Muslim family, *The Translator* could be seen as a text that builds on the existing literature by Arab/Muslim writers in its representation of patriarchy, but also one that departs from them, by looking at motherhood and the family from a different perspective offering a more complicated vision of motherhood and the family.

3. "I wouldn't be able to handle him on my own"

The first aspect of *The Translator* that I want to address in discussing Aboulela's subversion of the limited conception of Arab/Muslim motherhood is the representation of maternal ambivalence which in the previously discussed texts appears to be a result of the mother's naïve acceptance of patriarchal ideals. Sammar's ambivalence towards Amir is introduced to the reader very early in the narrative. The narrator comments on Sammar's abandonment of Amir as follows: "[s]he had given the child to Mahasen and it had not meant anything, nothing, as if he had not been once a piece of her, with her wherever she walked" (7). Further into the narrative, the narrator adds, "[Sammar] had not been able to cry over her son's head when she held him goodbye" (28). This scene implies the existence of a sense of aloofness between Sammar and her son. The first quote suggests a change in Sammar's emotions towards her son; rupture of a bond that was once strong.

Unlike the other texts' depiction of the ambivalence being a result of the mother's blind acceptance of patriarchy, in *The Translator* it is the mother's retaliation against patriarchy that disturbs her relationship with Amir. Sammar stands in opposition to the portrayal of the widowed mother in Halaby's text, Farah who learns to "tack" the pain of

multiple enforced marriages "deep inside . . . in one small corner inside" (49), but she is reminiscent of Hosna bin Mahmood, the widowed mother in Salih's *Season*.

Hosna and Sammar are similar in their subversion of societal pressure and patriarchy. Hosna refuses many marriage proposals, specifically the one of Wad Rayyes, an old man in his seventies, already married, and who, as one of the narrators puts it, "changed women as he changed donkeys" (Salih 96). Similarly, Am Ahmad Yassin, who proposes to Sammar, when she returns to Sudan for Tarig's funeral, is an old married man. In *Season*, the narrator's grandfather defends the very old womaniser Wad Rayyes arguing, "Wad Rayyes is sprightly enough–and he's got money . . . [i]n any case, the woman needs someone to protect her. Three years have passed since her husband's death. Doesn't she ever want to remarry?" (86). Likewise, in *The Translator*, Sammar defends Am Ahmad saying, "he feels a duty towards women" (13). The intention of both men seems to be offering protection to widows. However, Mahasen in *The Translator* (13) and Mahjoub, the narrator's friend in *Season* (100), argue against the innocence of both men's intent.

The difference between Sammar and Hosna is that Hosna furiously refuses the proposal despite her father and brothers' approval: "if they force me to marry, I'll kill him and kill myself" (96), Hosna contends. Waïl Hassan believes that Sammar is the anti-thesis of Hosna. He explains that while Hosna refuses to adhere to patriarchal commands, Sammar passively accepts it. Comparing both characters, Hassan argues:

> It is in this rejection of feminism, tied as it is to a total denial of freedom and agency, that Aboulela's ideological project parts ways with Salih's. An apt example drives this idea home. In *The Translator*, Sammar clings to gender roles sometimes considered outdated even back in Sudan. She is willing, shortly after the death of her husband, to be the third and youngest wife of Ahmad Ali Yasseen, a man nearly three times her

> age and who seems to be a variation on Wad Rayyes, the aging womanizer in Salih's *Season*. (197)

I want to argue that considering Sammar's acceptance of marriage proposal as a sign of passivity is reductionist since it reduces the widowed characters' rebellion to declining marriage. This view of the character's rejection of patriarchy overlooks the fact that by accepting to marry Am Ahmad, Sammar subverts a patriarchal framework which denies widows the right to fulfil their personal desires through marriage. What is ironic in Mahasen's patriarchal domination is that she debunks a patriarchal masculinist attitude by enforcing another; she exposes the not-so-noble intentions of Am Ahmad Yassin, and by doing so she reveals her own malice–the desire to strip Sammar of agency over her own future.

Sammar and Hosna defy patriarchy through refusing to submit to the expectations of their surroundings; this is the second instance where *The Translator* intersects with *Season*. Both writers show that patriarchy does exist in the culture of both characters. Nevertheless, through their protagonists, Salih and Aboulela demonstrate that women can resist patriarchal expectations. However, the route to resistance is often risky. Salih demonstrates the rigidity and prevalence of certain patriarchal norms; Hosna's resistance costs her own life. When the narrator expresses his surprise at the price women continue to pay when they contest patriarchy, his friend Mahjoub answers, "[t]he world hasn't changed as much as you think . . . everything's as it was" (100). Unlike *Season*, in *The Translator*, patriarchal attitudes seem to be less resistant to change and rebellion–they are ironically "challenged" by Mahasen herself–she tells Sammar about Am Ahmad's proposal, "[h]*e can take his religiousness and*

build a mosque but keep away from us. In the past, widows needed protection, life is different now" (italics in original 13).

Not only does Sammar's insistence on marriage challenge patriarchal denial of women's desires, but it also challenges monolithic representations of Arab/Muslim mothers as oppressed victims and puppets of patriarchal traditions and men. After Tarig's death, Sammar openly expresses a desire to remarry, telling her mother-in-law, "I want to get married again, I need a focus in my life" (26). Sammar is therefore not a mere "belly for reproduction" like the mothers in Bouraoui's novel. Sammar's expression of her personal desire contests women's negative perception of self-satisfaction in Halaby's text who "don't know what it is to be satisfied, and it scares them", and it also challenges the bad fate that Sultana's mother faces in Mokeddem's novel where "audacity" to express happiness and self-fulfilment leads the mother to the grave.

Sammar's retaliation against patriarchy is not restricted to her attempt to reclaim her right to marriage, but when Sammar's quest for self-fulfilment is not attained, she protests against Mahasen by relinquishing her son and migrating to Scotland on her own. Sammar's separation from her son makes her mothering non-conformist, both to patriarchal norms and to simplistic depictions of Arab/Muslim motherhood. Sammar's transnational motherhood becomes one of the ways whereby Aboulela problematises the migrant Arab/Muslim maternal figure and motherhood, like other women writers who as Tegan Zimmerman asserts "have increasingly turned to transnational topics in order to expound and explicate the maternal and matrilineal genealogies in innovative ways" (13). Regarding Sammar's transnational motherhood, Ghadir K. Zannoun states that denying Sammar her right to get married and expecting her to be fulfilled by being devoted to her son when saying, "*your son is your focus*" (emphasis in original 26), Mahasen expects Sammar to adhere to "the universal expectations of motherhood" (4). Thus, Zannoun considers Sammar's departure to Scotland

without her son a form of resistance to universal expectations about mothers. Moreover, Sammar's decision to leave behind her son "destabilizes the Western category of the Muslim woman by revealing the ways in which Sammar's life is complicated not only by socioeconomic factors and culture but by love, death, and mourning" (Zannoun 4). Zannoun is among the few critics who shed light on the representation of motherhood in *The Translator*, nonetheless, her study does not centre on the examination of motherhood. My reading of the mother figure in *The Translator* resonates with Zannoun's argument in that Sammar's character subverts normative imaginations about mothers by first seeking personal fulfilment and by embodying a mode of motherhood that is affected by external factors such as patriarchy, grief, and trauma of losing a sense of belonging, and love. But I also argue that this challenge is not confined to Western constructions of the Arab/Muslim woman and mother, but it extends to reductive imaginations disseminated by writers regardless of their location or heritage as we will see in the following discussion.

In addition to problematising the normative perception of Arab/Muslim motherhood by Sammar's quest for personal desire and transnational motherhood, Aboulela further complicates the figure of the mother through presenting a mothering mode that is ambivalent. Maternal ambivalence represented in a complex way through the mother's point of view is one way in which Aboulela complicates the image of the Arab/Muslim mother. In psychoanalysis, maternal ambivalence is a prominent concept. In "The Production and Purposes of Maternal Ambivalence", psychotherapist, art historian, feminist, and writer Rozsika Parker defines maternal ambivalence as a "contradictory state of mind, shared variously by all mothers, in which loving and hating feelings for children exists side by side" (17). Similarly, psychoanalyst Barbara Almond defines ambivalence as "a combination of the loving and hating feelings we experience toward those who are important to us. Maternal ambivalence is a normal phenomenon. It is ubiquitous. It is not a crime or a failing" (19).

Both scholars affirm that maternal ambivalence is a shared and normal state among mothers. This is because the coexistence of love and hate feelings within the mother for her child has always been perceived negatively. Almond's assertion that maternal ambivalence is not "a crime or a failing" implies that it has been perceived as such. In the same chapter mentioned above, Parker claims that culture is to blame for the maternal ambivalence that mothers experience. Through cultural perceptions of maternal ambivalence as "a source of shame or object of disbelief" people "help to produce" this phenomenon as a taboo signifier of maternal behaviour or thought (Parker 17). The negative perception of ambivalence, Parker believes, leads the mother to start "weathering the painful feelings evoked by experiencing maternal ambivalence", the mother eventually falls into the trap of guilt because of the difficulty of her task (17).

The Translator's presentation of maternal ambivalence corresponds to the ideas of Parker specifically the text's depiction of people's perception of Sammar's ambivalence. Sammar's feelings of ambivalence and her decision to leave her son behind are not acceptable or at least not understood in her family and by people that she knows, both in Sudan and in Scotland. For this reason, Sammar's ambivalence is aggravated by the feeling of guilt that she constantly grapples with. However, Sammar cannot disclose her feelings; she is unable to confide in anyone about her maternal ambivalence. She rather chooses to allude to her inner turmoil, but even close people are not able to fathom her confusion. When she discusses her trip back to Sudan with Rae, Sammar tries to unveil her maternal ambivalence. Rae thinks that her trip is "a good chance for you [Sammar] to go home, see your family". Sammar answers "I'm afraid". But Rae does not understand that Sammar is afraid of meeting her son after these years of separation, he rather believes: "It's natural to be afraid of a new job" (28). He does not consider the fact that after four years of separation, the encounter with everyone in Sudan and specifically with Amir constitutes a challenge for Sammar. A similar

incident happens with her brother, Waleed, in his house, when he asks her to take Amir with her. Sammar responds, "'I wouldn't be able to handle him on my own.' She wished she could explain how desolate it would be, her and Amir alone in Aberdeen" (150). In a moment of weakness, Sammar attempts to uncover her feelings to her only brother, then, she declines the attempt. To Sammar, people who are the closest to her seem to care only about Amir's feelings, ignoring her own fears and doubts. Not only people at home are blind to her own confusion, but even Diane, the PhD student who shares an office with Sammar, does not understand her. For Diane, the "normal" reason for a migrant mother separation from her child must be related to issues of borders and visas. Realising that Sammar is born in Britain, "Diane looked disappointed as if she had been expecting a hard-luck story about the injustice of the Home Office" (72). Aboulela portrays maternal ambivalence as a taboo and as a phenomenon that no one regardless of their educational level, their location, or their relationship to the mother could relate to or understand.

This lack of sympathy and support deepen Sammar's ambivalence. Sammar is afraid of the stigma of being labelled a bad mother if she reveals her ambivalence. Aboulela's emphasis on the sensitivity of maternal ambivalence and Sammar's inability to open up about it ties in well with Parker's earlier claim that society's perception of ambivalence as a taboo intensifies the mother's feeling of guilt, which consequently aggravates her ambivalence. The relationship between Sammar's ambivalence, guilt, and patriarchal expectations on mothers is illustrated in the following quote. The narrator says that Sammar "would remember Amir and feel guilty that she rarely thought of him, never dreamt of him. She was far from what her aunt wanted her to be, the child was not the focus of her life, not the centre where once his father had been" (112). It suggests that there is an ideal of motherhood which Sammar aspires to embody in order to satisfy patriarchal ideologies of motherhood. As a result of trying hard to satisfy patriarchal standards and being faced with a "reality" that is completely

different from the ideals of this ideology, Sammar falls prey to guilt. Eventually, she rejects this oppressive motherhood which denies her the right to start a new life after losing her husband.

As a result of the taboo nature that is attached to maternal ambivalence, Parker asserts that humour becomes the only outlet through which mothers could write about maternal ambivalence in novels as well as in magazines and national newspapers (17). She argues that it is the safety that laughter offers which encourages mothers to write "their 'confessions' . . . [to] admit to being forever enraged, entranced, embattled, wounded and delighted by their children" (17). The genre of writing that Parker refers to here is called "mommy lit". Writer and literary critic Heather Hewett defines mommy lit as the literature that "explored the 'real' experience of motherhood honestly, without sentimentality or idealization or judgment, from the point of view of the mother" (121). Hewett states that the birth of mommy lit is marked by Allison Pearson's publication of her 2002 novel *I Don't Know How She Does It: The Life of Kate Reddy, Working Mother* (119). Hewett describes the work that marks the birth of "mommy lit" as "a darkly comic tale of one woman's frenzied attempt to have it all" (119). Using humour allows Pearson to depict one of the major causes of maternal ambivalence in the Western societies–women's (in)ability to have both work and children.

Without a doubt, humourist writing is a safe context that has become very popular among writers enabling them to open up about taboo subjects such as maternal ambivalence. Yet, there is another way in which writers have been approaching mothers' attitudes towards their children and motherhood. In 1976, Rich wrote: "[t]he words are being spoken now, are being written down, the taboos are being broken, the masks of motherhood are cracking through. For centuries no one talked of these feelings" (24-5). Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly assert that, "in women's literatures, and in particular within matrifocal narratives in

their attention to unmasking motherhood, we find . . . a more multifaceted, nuanced, and authentic representation of maternal ambivalence–one that is seldom recuperated through humour" (*Textual Mothers* 15-6). This means that matrifocal narratives are the focal point in the depiction of maternal ambivalence honestly and overtly. Although many of the texts continued to be dominated by the narrative voice of the daughter (Hirsch 136), others represent the mother's story from her own point of view. Hirsch asserts that "several women writers have written in specifically maternal voices . . . [t]he numbers are few, although the texts are important" (176).

In a more recent publication entitled "Matrifocal Voices in Literature", Podnieks elaborates more on the definition of matrifocal narratives. One of the main features of matrifocal narratives which distinguishes them from other narratives about mothers is their narrative voice. Podnieks argues that "[m]atrifocal literatures are written and narrated by mothers in the first-person or limited third-person voice, rendering maternal identity and experience from subjective perspectives". Presenting the maternal story by a maternal character creates an intimacy between the mother figure and the reader. For her, a first-person as well as the limited third-person narrator promise a maternal story free from any mediator– the daughter or the omniscient narrator. The result of this "authentic" depiction of motherhood is one that could "contest or negotiate traditional ideologies of the 'good' mother as self-sacrificing, nurturing, and sexless" (Podnieks 176).

Despite contesting the image of the mother which Podnieks speaks about above through claiming her agency over her own life, Sammar remains "haunted", to borrow Rich's word (23), by the idea of the very powerful mother that patriarchy propagates. Patriarchy interferes in Sammar's mothering in two ways. The first way in which patriarchy contributes to the rupture of the bond between Sammar and her son is through Sammar's internalisation

of the unrealistic image that patriarchal expectations build about mothers. The second is the fact that Sammar leaves her son behind because Mahasen denies her need for “a focus”. This pressure on Sammar to ignore her own desires, and the fact that her wishes are belittled, in addition to the unrealistic image of the mother which she internalises make her feel inadequate and incapable of mothering her child. The perception of motherhood which Sammar internalises is difficult to achieve. The mother, for her, should be strong and undefeated by grief. Sammar sees in Mahasen the perfect mother who she could not imitate. Mahasen is able to care not only for her own children, Tarig and Hanan, but also for her grandchildren. Sammar once talks to Rae about Mahasen, she tells him, “[m]y aunt is a strong woman”, she adds, “a leader really. She is looking after my son now” (7). She thinks motherhood requires strength that she does not have. Comparing herself to Mahasen, Sammar does not consider herself a strong mother. To Sammar, being moved by death is a sign of weakness that will not allow her to mother her son as Sammar believes that the child “demanded her totally” (8). The feeling of being unable to meet the expectations of patriarchy added to her strong sense of emptiness after Tarig’s death disturb her mothering experience. Sammar develops feelings of hatred for her son. She never misses him or even talks about him and spends four years without even seeing him (7). Patriarchy thereby is one of the major triggers of Sammar’s ambivalence.

The fact that patriarchy is considered a reason for maternal ambivalence implies that Sammar’s maternal confusion transcends her relationship with Amir. This idea of external factors being the triggers of maternal ambivalence recalls Ivana Brown’s thoughts in her study of maternal ambivalence in a number of memoirs of Western female writers. In her study, she concludes that “the conflict and the negative side of mothering [are] rooted in the social conditions of a patriarchal society–in which mothers are left to the care of their children in the isolation of the nuclear family and without sufficient structural support

system–rather than in their relationship with their children" (125). The impact of social norms on mothering, thus, features as the main disturbance of mother/child relationship. Brown goes on to discuss the recurrence of certain themes which relate to social and cultural ideologies about mothers and their maternal experiences. She states that "[a]mong the most common themes are divergences between expectations and reality of motherhood, formation of maternal identity, difficulties in combining work and child care, and mothering according to prevailing social expectations" (126). Hence, literary texts which depict maternal ambivalence attempt to show the impact of social expectations on the way mothers experience it. In many of these texts, social and cultural expectations enact enormous pressure on mothers which makes them feel unfit for mothering realising the difficulty of living up to the standards of those expectations.

Maternal ambivalence in *The Translator* differs from that of texts by western writers in that the mother's struggle between work and children does not seem to be a reason for Sammar's ambivalence and is not portrayed as a source of tension even for other working mothers in the novel. In *The Translator*, there are three working mothers: Sammar, Rae's secretary Yasmin, and Hanan who works as a dentist back in Sudan. Readers are not provided enough information about Yasmin's relationship with her new-born daughter as she takes maternity leave and moves to Qatar with her husband. Yasmin's experience of motherhood is not given much space in the novel. Alternatively, Hanan's mothering is presented with more detail. Something very important about Hanan is that she lives with her husband and four children in her mother's house. The responsibility of Hanan's children is shared between her, her mother, and Sammar. Several times in the text, Mahasen puts Hanan's new-born to sleep (136, 141, 167,168). The repetitive act of Mahasen putting the child to sleep indicates that it is a routine. Another important thing is that Hanan's child does not go to kindergarten and there is no mention of a babysitter. Hanan's child is not the only one among her children who

is taken care of by other members of the family. When she is in Sudan, Sammar takes care of Dalia, Hanan's daughter who is Amir's age. She takes her to school with Amir, gives her showers, entertains her, and combs her hair regularly (140-141, 167). The writer once mentions that every day, Dalia comes down from her parents' flat upstairs so that Sammar prepares her for school along with Amir, the narrator states, "[f]irst thing in the morning, Dalia would come down, nailing ribbons and comb, a smudged tube of Wella form. 'Braid my hair, hurry, I'll be late for school'" (160).

The mothering that is portrayed in Mahasen's house is joint. It is one that saves the mother from feeling torn between her children and personal achievement. Shared mothering saves the maternal characters from being overwhelmed for not being able to fulfil both roles as seen in the Pearson's novel above. When Hanan, then, takes over the responsibility of looking after her children, she is represented as a confident and grounded woman. The narrator describes Hanan's assertiveness when she comes back home after a long day of work, as follows, "Hanan appeared at the door like a hero, solid and in control, dignified in her dentist's working clothes. She smacked Dalia, picked up her screaming baby and herded her messy twins upstairs" (168). This passage might be read as an indication of the constant family support's impact on Hanan's ability to handle responsibilities of work and mothering when needed. Hanan here is not overwhelmed despite coming from work and being encountered with what sounds like a chaotic situation. This being said, the scene is not meant to depict a romanticised depiction of a mother who is undefeated despite the challenges. It is rather an illustration of the importance of family support in empowering mothers.

Before moving to the discussion of the other factors of Sammar's maternal ambivalence, I would like to further elaborate on *The Translator*'s depiction of the family and kin relationships being at once sources of oppression and empowerment for the female

characters including Sammar. This idea of the double significance of the family and kin in the life of the Arab/Muslim character is very important to the current discussion as it challenges simplistic depictions and discussions of the life of Arab/Muslim woman within the presumably patriarchal family. When family relationships are presented by Arab/Muslim writers in literature and in relation to the making of the self, they are often depicted negatively. In *Making Sense of Contemporary Muslim British Novels*, Claire Chambers notes that there is a recurrent trope among novels by writers of Muslim background and that is of protagonists who strive to leave behind their "repressive" families in favour of the "apparently liberatory, secular West" (126).

Studying literature by writers of Arab/Muslim heritage, Marnia Lazreg considers the writing and studies which tend to erase the complexities of Arab/Muslim women's lives an act of "complicity" with Western feminist discourses which represent Arab/Muslim women in a simplistic way ("Feminism and Difference" 89). She asserts that Arab and Muslim women writers and scholars will succeed to defy stereotypes against them if they attend to what she refers to as the "complexity of difference" that characterises their lives (100). Lazreg carries on explaining that for women in Arab and Muslim societies who aspire to resist negative stereotypes, their negation of these stereotypes should be done in addition to "reevaluat[ing] the structure of gender relations in their societies" rather than responding to the stereotypes by solely negating them (100-1).

Lazreg's emphasis on the importance of studying and representing particularities of relationships within Arab/Muslim societies recalls Joseph's emphasis on the construction of the self as it is generally encouraged in Arab/Muslim world which she discusses in her book *Intimate Selving*. Joseph is an anthropologist who examines the representation of the family in Arab literature. She has written extensively about the way ideas about intersubjectivity and

individuality are discussed in Arab/Muslim and in Western societies. The self emerges in relation to the other–achievement of subjectivity in Arab/Muslim societies is not measured by the person's individuality but rather by his/her relationality to people around him/her, "[t]he agency of the self is situated, contextual, and relational. The actors are discussed in webs of relationships" (Joseph 15). This is a very crucial point in this discussion since many literary works by Arab/Muslim writers feature female protagonists who favour a "Western" model of subjectivity that often encourages individuality instead of relationality which generally entails denouncing one's familial bonds considering them ties to regression and a source of oppression[21].

In *The Translator*, the representation of the family is nuanced and complicated; it corresponds to the ideas of the above discussion about the significance of relationships in attaining agency and subjectivity. The overlap between Lazreg's and Joseph's ideas is the importance of attending to the subtleties that characterise Arab/Muslim societal and familial structures. Particularities of the family that are at the core of the understanding of

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[21] I am by no means here arguing that the whole of the "West" is individualistic and the "Arab/Muslim world" is collective, I am rather throughout the thesis challenging a binary oppositional view of "Western" culture as individualistic hence liberatory, and "Arab/Muslim" culture as collective meaning suffocating and constraining. This binary thinking constructs societies and cultures as monolithic; an idea that my thesis deconstructs through emphasising the complex nature of the representation of characters and cultures in the novels that I analyse. Joseph's ideas about the collective are particularly important for the present study for two reasons. The first is the subversion of the simplistic depiction of the Arab/Muslim family as misogynistic and as the root of women's oppression. The second reason is to highlight the difference that characterises the portrayal of maternal ambivalence in many Western literary texts and in *The Translator*, and the role that the extended family, as it is depicted in Aboulela's text, plays in protecting the mother from the feelings of isolation and lack of support which she often endures when mothering in a nuclear family (a family model discussed and presented in Western scholarship and literature as a major reason behind maternal ambivalence as I demonstrated above). I want also to highlight the fact that collectivity and individualism can and do exist side by side in different societies and even within the same person as I will show in the analysis of Sammar's relationship with Mahasen.
My argument about individualism and intersubjectivity and collectivity is in line with the ideas of Joseph who argues that "Western psychology and liberal feminism largely have accepted individualist tenets of Western psychology built in part on the untheorized gender binary. Central to these tenets has been a naturalization of individualism through the Western psychotherapeutic assumption that individuation is necessary for maturation and agency" (17). It is this premise that individuation is a condition for agency that my study subverts through different ways among which is the examination of complex family relationships.

Arab/Muslim subjectivity and which are under investigated dominate the narrative of *The Translator*. Through the character of Sammar, Aboulela portrays the importance of family relationships in the emergence of female subjectivity.

Throughout the novel, Aboulela emphasises the strong kinship ties and friendship in Sammar's life. Among the scenes that capture the centrality of family relationships in Sammar's female subjectivity is the one that features her shopping for coats. The scene is about Sammar's longing for her mother-in-law despite their conflict, she wishes that they "could be close again, friends, like in the years before Tarig died" (68). This quote shows the close relationship between Sammar and Mahasen, yet what makes this scene even more expressive of the idea of intersubjectivity are the mirrors in the changing room. The narrator explains that "[i]n the dressing room with the mirrors behind her and in front of her, too many reflections of herself, she [Sammar] missed her aunt" (68). This passage suggests that Sammar sees herself in Mahasen–when she sees *her*self, Sammar recalls her aunt. The writer, here, shows that Sammar is surrounded by "too many" reflections of herself which implies having the ability to see a clearer or a deeper vision of herself. Remembering and missing her aunt when she comes face-to-face with a deeper level of her own self can be considered an indication of strong connectivity and intersubjectivity. The continuation of this scene of the mirrors and reflections demonstrates the complexity of the relationality of the self. In that scene of the changing room, Sammar is basically choosing between two coats, and she thinks Mahasen would love the one that "had golden buttons" (68). Eventually, Sammar opts for the other coat which is not what Mahasen would have wanted to her to choose. This choice might be read as an analogy for the coexistence of intersubjectivity and personal agency. As Joseph claims above that relationality and connectivity does not imply that these ideals are in

conflict with agency[22]. The close bond between Sammar and Mahasen is also revealed in the scene of the two characters' first encounter. Upon Sammar's arrival in Sudan, Mahasen shows everyone in the family that Sammar is closer to her than Waleed. The narrator describes one of the first encounters between Sammar and Mahasen as follows: "Mahasen sat on one of the chairs in the garden and drew Sammar to her. Sammar took in the sudden perfume, the flowers embroidered on the sun-coloured to be, its texture so close Mahasen smoothed Sammar's eyebrows with her thumb, touch her earlobes, her chin. "This is the one who pleases me" (48). This scene clearly illustrates the love that Mahasen carries for Sammar. Sammar is surprised to find a picture of herself feeding pigeon in Trafalgar square laying on Mahasen's bed-side table (49). This scene further emphasises their intimacy and suggests the existence of an instant attachment that Mahasen has with Sammar despite geographical distance.

However, this closeness between members of the family where they "are expected to remain in close proximity to their families and to be responsible for and to each other much of their lives" (Joseph 9) might lead to what Joseph calls "patriarchal connectivity" (12). Joseph defines patriarchal connectivity as "the production of selves with fluid boundaries organized for gendered and aged domination", adding that, "[p]atriarchy entails cultural constructs and structural relations that privilege the initiative of males and elders in directing the lives of others" (189). This suggests that males and seniors of the family could take advantage of the culture of close family relations to dominate the lives of other members of

[22] This scene of the coat store along with the idea of Sammar's pursuit of personal desires indicates the text's presentation of a nuanced intertwining of intersubjectivity and individuality. When intersubjectivity restrains Sammar's agency, she chooses her individual and personal needs. Joseph expresses this idea of the interweaving of connectivity and individualism as follows: "connectivity exists side by side with individualism in the same culture and perhaps even in the same person. There are not oppositional polarities. They often partake of each other, being applied situationally or, at times, leading to tensions within and between persons" (189).

the family. This is what makes Joseph's concept of "patriarchal connectivity" relevant to the analysis of Mahasen's relationship with Sammar.

The strong relationship between Sammar and Mahasen remains unchanged even after Sammar gets married to Tarig. In a playful way, Sammar tells Tarig "I love your mother more than you" (9). However, this bond is interrupted with Tarig's death. The mother-like figure of Mahasen becomes cold and unloving towards Sammar; whenever Sammar is mentioned, Mahasen says "[t]hat idiot girl" (9). Not knowing that Sammar is still interested in getting married and still pursues love, Mahasen sends a letter to Sammar when the latter's date of arrival to Sudan approaches. The tone of contempt is not present in the novel, yet the letter is written in an authoritative tone:

> I am so glad you seem to have got rid of this ridiculous idea of getting married again- when you see Amir, how lovable he is, you will not have the hard heart to be so selfish and bring him a stepfather, some stranger who will not treat him well. Of course it doesn't matter where you are, no one is seeing you there but when you come, it would be better not to wear so much colour, you know how people get ideas. (78)

The letter displays Mahasen's indifference to Sammar's suffering and desires. She is not interested in knowing how Tarig's death comes to affect her or how she copes with distance from her son and Sudan. Mahasen perceives Sammar's desire to get married as a "ridiculous idea" and a "selfish" act. For Mahasen, if the widow wants to get married when she is a mother, it means that she has a "hard heart". All these harsh words show that Mahasen permits herself to address Sammar in this way because she knows that Sammar respects her

for her age and more importantly for the closeness that exists between them. Mahasen even wants Sammar to wear clothes that show that she still grieves Tarig. Here Mahasen attempts to use her authority as a senior in the family to dominate Sammar. This nuanced view of the Arab/Muslim family unsettles the stereotypical one that dominates the texts discussed above by other writers of Arab/Muslim heritage. Remarkably, *The Translator* does not feature a "forbidding father" like the other texts, but it rather projects a different narrative of patriarchy and domination. Mahasen's character is not a cliché of Arab/Muslim patriarchy, she is both loving and hating, she is supportive and domineering, and even her patriarchal orders have a somewhat "feminist" undertone, particularly the fact that she believes a woman can support herself without the need to depend on a male relative.

Although Mahasen's pressure enormously affects Sammar's relationship with her son, and by and large her conceptualisation of motherhood, the hate and coldness that Sammar experiences are not solely a result of patriarchy, Sammar's grief over Tarig is a major contributor as well. Throughout the story, Tarig appears as a loving husband; his death leaves Sammar deeply grieving and her grief accentuates her maternal ambivalence. Aboulela pays much attention to describing the relationship between Sammar and Tarig from childhood to their married life. In their childhood, the narrator shows that Sammar saw Tarig as a confident boy, "[e]verywhere they went, Tarig did what Hanan and Sammar would not do" (49). The difference and boldness in Tarig are what attracted Sammar to him "[she] was distracted by Tarig, her eyes fixed on him" and yet as the narrator claims, "[s]he liked her cousin Hanan better" (49). This preference of Hanan, though, soon changes into teenage love for Tarig. The development of Sammar and Tarig's feelings is captured in the following quote: "[i]t had been easy to talk when they were young. Things changed when they outgrew sparklers and bikes . . . if Hanan left them alone, to make Tang [juice] or answer the telephone there would be an awkward silence between them" (25). Then in their marriage,

Tarig comes to signify many important things in Sammar's life. In addition to being her "focus" and the thread that connects her to Sudan, as mentioned above, Tarig is represented as Sammar's source of comfort and support in difficult times. A scene that illustrates the love that exists between them and the comfort that Tarig offers Sammar is the one that depicts her miscarriage: "[s]he remembered Tarig being calm, warm and sure of what to do. She remembered him on his hands and knees mopping the bathroom floor, her womb that had fallen apart. There was gratitude between them. Gratitude cushioned the quarrels, petty and deep. It levelled the dips in affection" (12). The enormous love and support that Tarig shows to Sammar is what made her mourn his loss for four years.

During the four years of mourning, Sammar could not cope with the loss of Tarig. Memories of Tarig and his love do not leave her: the "gratitude came to her in trances and in dreams. Dreams with neither settings nor narratives, just the feeling, distilled" (12). Sammar, thus, lives with memories of Tarig, and stuck in the time of his loss unable to move forward: "[t]he ifs were poisonous snakes, whispering. For years the ifs had tangled up her mind, tugged away at her faith, made her unable to walk up the stairs". The "ifs" refer to Sammar imagining a different scenario to the day of Tarig's death (51). This passage shows that Sammar is emotionally and physically hampered by this loss. Her inability to walk up the stairs is a symbol for her inability to unchain from grief. Similarly, Sammar's relationship with her son is obstructed by this loss. The impact that Tarig's death has on Sammar's relationship with Amir is described as paralysis; the narrator explains: "Sammar was still paralysed, unresponsive to her son" (21). Tarig's death freezes Sammar's ability to connect to life and breaks her bond with her son.

Discussing the impact of the loss of a loved person on one's life, Roberta Rubenstein asserts that the loss of a loved object affects the person's feelings and attitudes towards

people and things around him/her. She argues that there is a sense of nostalgia that accompanies the loss of a loved person, a place, or even a certain time: "[n]ostalgia in this sense is a kind of haunted longing". She goes on to argue that this longing is "both remembered and imagined, impinge on a person's emotional life, affecting her or his behaviour toward current experiences and attachments. Implicit in the deeper register of nostalgia is the element of grief for something of profound value that seems irrevocably lost" (5). What Rubenstein is saying here is that the loss of an object that the person considers "irrevocable" entails a feeling of nostalgia that resides within the person and does not leave him/her.

The state that Rubenstein describes is similar to Sammar's state. Sammar believes that Tarig's loss is irrevocable, and this feeling affects her relationship with Amir enormously. In a scene that perfectly depicts the impact that Tarig's loss has on Sammar's maternal feelings, the narrator shows Sammar's aggressive tone: "she picked him [Amir] up, shook him and hissed, 'I wish it was you instead, you are so easily replaceable'" (79). To be able to tell her son that she wished he died instead of his father is a clear indication of Sammar's ambivalence. Sammar already believes that she is unfit to mother; that motherhood requires strength that she does not have. This feeling of inadequacy is intensified by Tarig's loss because as the narrator affirms, "[t]he child would not let her be, would not let her sink like she wanted to sink" (8). Sammar wants to live in grief: "she lived in a room with nothing on the wall, nothing personal, no photographs, no books; just like a hospital room . . . she had neither the heart nor the means to buy things" (15-6). She knows that it is not sensible to live this life with her son and wants to grieve on her own. In ways that mirror Rubenstein's claims

about the impact of grief, Sammar's love for Amir turns to hate. Sammar has lost the ability to love after losing Tarig.

Sammar's grief does not have an impact only on her mothering but also on her sense of belonging which was very much contingent on her love for Tarig. In addition to revealing Sammar's desire to grieve on her own, the hospital room also symbolises Sammar's alienation from life in the outside world. Since the start of the story, Scotland is represented as a strange place where Sammar cannot feel at home. As if Tarig's death "exposes" the strangeness of the place as well as its racism which becomes another trigger of Sammar's maternal ambivalence. This idea of grief is central to the entire narrative. Discussing it in this chapter is very significant because it at once sheds light on the idea of a complex maternal subjectivity where the mother's feelings are affected by an array of external factors, like grief and racism, and not solely by patriarchy, and it also adds nuance to the portrayal of the mother's migrant subjectivity which is quite often erased.

For the four entire years of Sammar's grief, streets in Aberdeen are "a maze of culture shocks" (70). Earlier in the chapter, discussing the influence of Salih's *Season* on the construction of Sammar's character as a migrant parent, I stated that one of the similarities between the two texts concerning migrant parenting is the protagonists' fear of bringing up children away from their country of origin or heritage. At the very end of *The Translator*, when Sammar eventually decides to take Amir to Scotland with her, the narrator reveals racism as one of the reasons that hindered that decision four years ago: "[s]he was going to take Amir to . . . a new school where they might not like him much, look at him in a surprised way". In a similar manner to that of Mustafa, Sammar, and until the end of the novel, shows discomfort and sadness over taking Amir to Scotland with her. The narrator states that for Sammar, taking her son to Scotland means taking him "away from his cousins, his

grandmother, his house. She was going to take him to a place that was all grey, its noises muffled by clouds" (179). In the novel, Sammar's fears for her son facing racism seem justifiable. She has herself experienced racism, during the Gulf War, "a man shouted at her in King Street, *Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein*" (emphasis in original 99). Right after mentioning this racist incident, the narrator goes on citing another incident that Sammar experiences with her head of department Jennifer. Jennifer tells Sammar, "'[m]y boyfriend is Nigerian,' and paused as if that statement had a deeper meaning she wanted Sammar to grasp . . . reassuring her of how broad-minded and tolerant she was, not like so many people. 'For example, Jennifer said, 'I have no problem at all with the way you dress'". Jennifer might want to make Sammar feel comfortable and to stress that being Muslim and wearing the hijab does not mean that Sammar is *different*. However, Jennifer's words make Sammar feel uncomfortable and alienated, "[w]hen Sammar finally spoke, she managed. 'Thank you'" (100). Jennifer's words create a wide gap between them and alienate Sammar even more; Sammar "went home and slept. She slept deeply and continuously until the next day" (100). Sleep, here, becomes Sammar's refuges from alienation.

The setting in both incidents is very significant. They are set in the Gulf War, a time where, as the narrator says, "suddenly everyone became aware that Sammar was Muslim" (99). In *At Freedom's Limit: Islam and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Sadia Abbas argues that *The Translator* is set in a time where "anti-Muslim" sentiments were widespread, Muslims were in the spotlight, and threatening discourse of a future "'clash of civilisations' was propagated" (77). The places where and the people with whom the incidents occur are equally important; Sammar is accosted by an unknown person in the street and also spoken to in a familial setting of her workplace by her academic colleague and boss in a department of languages. This suggests that Sammar feels threatened and othered in both familiar and unfamiliar environments. Sammar does not see Scotland as a welcoming place where she can

raise her son; neither the streets nor educational institutions are safe for him. Racism and the anxiety it provokes are some of the main reasons for Sammar's ambivalence and for the rupture of her bond with her son.

4. Sammar and a Home in Flux

Moving now to the discussion of the impact of love, absence of love, and grief on Sammar's own migrant subjectivity and sense of belonging, I argue that Sammar's sense of belonging is linked to her love for Tarig. Tarig plays a very important role in the development of Sammar's migrant identity. Sammar's love for him is in many instances linked to her sense of belonging to Sudan. Sammar is born in Britain and she first visits Sudan when she is seven. Her seven years in Britain prior to her arrival in Sudan are not mentioned in the narrative. Telling Rae about her first encounter with Tarig, Sammar says, "it was not until I was seven that I met him" (4). The narrator's comment on Sammar's words are significant to the conceptualisation of Sammar's attachment to Sudan. The narrator says, "[t]hese were her words, the word 'until' as if she could not reconcile herself to those seven years of life without him". The narrator explains that at times Sammar would imagine a different start of her life. In Sudan and with Tarig, "[s]he liked to imagine that Tarig was waiting for her outside the delivery room . . . impatient for her" (4-5). This passage, like others in the novel, highlights the intense love Sammar has for Tarig. Yet, unlike other passages in the novel that demonstrate the love that Sammar and Tarig had for each other, this one specifically exemplifies the relationship between Sammar's love for Tarig and her sense of belonging to Sudan. Sammar's memories of the past are all about her life in Sudan. The way Sammar's memories of the past are presented show that Tarig's and Sudan's love become inseparable. Once again, the narrator comments on Sammar's attachment to the past

emphasising Tarig's strong presence, "like the elderly who remember the distant past more clearly than events of previous day, Sammar lived with a young Tarig inside her head" (22). Memories of Sudan and Tarig submerge into each other.

In Scotland, and when Tarig was alive, he was Sammar's link with Sudan. Not only this, but Tarig's presence cushions the nostalgia that Sammar experiences. For this reason, after his death, Sammar could not stay in Scotland and tells her son "[w]e're going home, we're finished here, we're going to Africa's sand, to dissolve in Africa's sand" (8). After losing the connection that she has with Sudan–Tarig–Sammar returns home, thinking that being there in Sudan–at "home"–will help her heal from her losses. Yet, once there, Sammar realises that she needs to get married to feel fulfilled. Being in Sudan is not enough to offer Sammar the focus that she misses. This void that Sammar feels even when she is in Sudan suggests that the meaning of being at home in the novel transcends geographical boundaries. The shift in the meaning of belonging from a geographical space to a person or memories of that person complicates Sammar's migrant identity.

Throughout the narrative there is an abundant emphasis on the effect of space on emotion and how emotions affect the way space is experienced. Both locations–Sudan and Scotland– are lived through emotion, which allows for, as explained previously, the meaning of home to transcend its geographical significance. The absence of Tarig's love makes Sammar exposed and vulnerable to the unfamiliarity of Scotland. Sammar becomes very alert to the differences between Sudan and Scotland; they become very noticeable, with Scotland forming a threatening emotional terrain. The following quote captures Sammar's desolation over her loneliness in Aberdeen:

> [s]he was afraid of rain, afraid of the fog and the snow which came to this country, afraid of the wind even. At such times she would stay indoors and wait, watching from her window people doing what she couldn't do . . . Last year when the city had been dark with fog, she hid indoors for four days, eating her way through the last packet of pasta in the cupboard, drinking tea without milk. On the fifth day when the fog lifted she went out famished, rummaging the shops for food, dizzy with the effort. (3)

The quote illustrates Sammar's retreat from daily life in Aberdeen. The weather which Sammar is afraid of is not exceptional; it is very frequent in winter days in Aberdeen. This means that Sammar lives a life of isolation and acute grief. This prolonged isolation makes it difficult for Sammar to adapt to life after Tarig. Therefore, several times in the novel, both the narrator and Sammar refer to her stay in Aberdeen as an exile rather than as migration (16, 150).

This intersection of the character's emotions with her experience of space evokes Kay Anderson and Susan Smith concept of emotional geographies. Anderson and Smith are scholars of geography who created the concept of emotional geographies to refer to the study of "how emotional relations shape society and space" (9). The parallel between their study, which is in the field of geography, and my analysis of Sammar's experience of Aberdeen as an exile is their emphasis on the role of emotion in shaping one's experience of a particular space. In their discussion of the concept, Anderson and Smith assert that, "[a]t particular times and in particular places, there are moments where lives are so explicitly lived through pain, bereavement, elation, anger, love and so on that the power of emotional relations cannot be ignored" (7). Considering their insights about the ability of emotional relations in shaping

one's life in general and one's relationship with space in particular, it can be argued that Sammar's life and experience of Sudan and Scotland is shaped by love and grief.

Like many narratives of migration, *The Translator* is imbued with instances where the protagonist expresses longing for her country of origin/heritage. In Scotland, Sammar yearns for everything that she could not find in Scotland. During the four years of her exile, Sammar longs for the Sudanese culture and language (44, 144) and the overt practice of Islam; the sound of azan (the call to prayer), and prayer "under the sky, the grass underneath" which she believes is incomparable to "having to hide in Aberdeen" to pray (160). She even yearns for small things that she used to enjoy back in Sudan, for example "one of the things she had missed in Aberdeen, ice cubes in drinks, the feel of a cool drink in the heat" (148). The text, thus, is saturated with images of Sammar's longing for Sudan as a location, for its social life, culture, and for the time that she spent there.

In order to offer a comprehensive understanding of the representation of Sammar's longing for Sudan, I turn to Rubenstein's distinction between the concepts of homesickness and nostalgia. In her discussion, Rubenstein differentiates between what nostalgic characters long for as opposed to those who are homesick, she writes:

> [a]s I considered narratives in which female characters long for or ponder their emotional distance from home, I realized that nostalgia encompasses something more than a yearning for literal places or actual individuals. While homesickness refers to a spatial/geographical separation, nostalgia more accurately refers to a temporal one. Even if one is able to return to the literal edifice where s/he grew up, one can never truly return to original home of childhood, since it exists mostly as a place in the imagination. (4)

Based on Rubenstein's distinction, I argue that Sammar's longing for Sudan could be referred to as both homesickness and nostalgia. After four years of being separated from Sudan, Sammar goes back. This trip back to Sudan is motivated by a work offer proposed by Rae. He suggests that Sammar participates in the interview which offers three-week translation work in Egypt. During the three weeks, Sammar translates interviews conducted with "members of extremist groups" (33) as part of an "anti-terrorist programme" (117). Among the most remarkable changes that occur to Sammar when she is in Sudan is through her relationship with the very place that she has been longing for four years. Throughout the narrative, Mahasen's house, the house that Sammar visits when she first comes to Sudan and which carries most of her past memories, is represented as a place that is "full of lights" (47), "hummed by fans and air coolers" and "busy . . . with a lot of coming and going" (135). This same house where she usually feels either hot or warm in one of the scenes revives her feelings of exile. In this scene, Mahasen accuses Sammar of indirectly killing Tarig because she pressured him to buy a car (170-1). Mahasen attacks Sammar accordingly: "[y]ou nagged him for that car and that car killed him". After this accusation, Sammar "felt cold, her bones cold and stiff, not moving smoothly, not moving with ease. She wanted a bed and a cover, sleep. She wanted to sleep like she used to sleep in Aberdeen, everything muffled up and grey, curling up". The feelings that Sammar experiences after the confrontation with Mahasen are typical of what she feels in her exile in Scotland. During those years, she always complains about the cold (171), her movements are slow "she had often taken a step at a time, dragging her grief" (41), and she sleeps when she feels most alienated, her sleep "c[o]me[s] so easily in this hospital room, in layers and hours" (22). Despite the novel's emphasis on the differences between Sudan and Scotland, the parallel between the way they

might be experienced suggests that exile is not exclusively linked to physical distance from one's country of origin/heritage.

Through depicting Sammar's feeling of dissatisfaction in Sudan, one could argue that Aboulela proclaims home as, "less an actual place than a site located in memory or fantasy, a psychic space invested with nostalgia for an idealized notion of wholeness" (Rubenstein 127). It is reasonable, then, to suggest that migrant characters long for an idealised image not an actual geographical space. Therefore, Sammar pursues something temporal rather than spatial. According to Rubenstein's distinction, Sammar wants to go back in time and restore the past that she lived *with* Tarig *in* Sudan, or at least restore the "wholeness", to use Rubenstein's word, that this past provided. Clinging to an imaginary Sudan transforms it to an exile in Sammar's second visit. Regarding the shift in Sammar's perception of Sudan, Zannoun writes that Sammar's "return to the homeland proves just as alienating [as Scotland], now that she has to navigate it as it is, without the mediation of Tarig's love" (4). It is Tarig's love, thus, that makes the time which Sammar longs for very significant. In the following passage, the narrator describes Sammar's anticipation of her feelings when she visits Sudan:

> "[a]t the back of her mind, the motivation, I will see home again . . . To see home again. It was a chandelier on the ceiling of her life, circles of lights. To see again the streets where Tarig had ridden his bike . . . To go to where everything happened, her aunt's house; laughter on their wedding, fire when she brought Tarig's body home. Shimmering things. Painting with ice on the liver-red ales, fearing stray dogs, in weddings dreaming of her own future wedding. (33)

Clearly, the memories that Sammar lived with Tarig dominate her memories of Sudan, for this reason, his absence which is an absence of love, makes Sudan an alienating place.

Nonetheless, Aboulela's representation of the migrant character's relationship with the country of origin/heritage does not undermine the importance of its geographical dimension. Sudan as a geographical space continues to be significant and to have a positive impact on Sammar. Being in Sudan without "Tarig's mediation" (Zannoun 4), is still rewarding. One example, among many, exemplifies the importance of Sudan as a country for Sammar is the narrator's detailed description of her feelings. The following quote comes at the start of the second part of the novel which is about Sammar's return in Sudan. The quote accentuates Sammar's relationship and experience of Sudan as a space:

> Sammar sat on the porch and there was no breeze: no moisture in the air, all was heat, dryness, desert dust. Her bones were content with that, supple again, young. They had forgotten how they used to be clenched. Her skin too had darkened from the sun, cleared and forgotten wool and gloves. (136)

Sudan is presented as satisfying to her long-awaited encounter. The narrator directly states that "[h]er homesickness was cured, her eyes cooled by what she saw" (144). Sammar's homesickness is healed yet "wholeness" is missing as a result of the absence of love in her life.

The narrative adds another level of complexity to the significance of home through another twist in Sammar's experience of Sudan and Scotland after the development of her feelings for Rae. Sammar and Rae's love accentuates the relationship between space and emotion even more. Before leaving Scotland for Egypt and then Sudan, Sammar has a big quarrel with Rae. When Rae confesses his love to Sammar (113), she asks him to convert to Islam so that they can get married: "[she] begged him: just say the *shahadah* [testimony of

faith], just say the words and it would be enough, we could get married then" (156). Rae refuses to convert if he does not believe in the religion, "'It's not in me to be religious,' he said! 'I studied Islam for the politics of the Middle East. I did not study it for myself I was not searching for something spiritual . . . In the middle of all the prejudice and hypocrisy, I wanted to be one of the few who was saying what was reasonable and right'" (126). After saying hurtful words to each other (129), Sammar feels that the barrier that this fight creates between them is "[a]nother exile, doubt, the exile of not being sure that anything existed between them" (173). For Sammar, this is "an exile she would take with her wherever she went" (125). Considering that distance from Rae is an exile that she takes with her everywhere she goes indicates that Sammar's wholeness is no longer contingent on where she is geographically located, it is rather dependant on being with the person that she loves regardless of geography.

Before the quarrel, Sammar's sense of exile in Scotland gradually starts to dissolve as a result of her feelings for Rae. The change begins when she first visits Rae's flat with Yasmin. Following the visit, the narrator states that:

> [Sammar] stepped into a hallucination in which the world had swung around. Home had come here. Its dimly lit streets, its sky and the feel of home had come here and balanced just for her. She saw the sky cloudless with too many stars, imagined the night warm, warmer than indoors. She smelled dust and heard the barking of stray dogs among the street's rubble and pot-holes. A bicycle bell tinkled, frogs croaked, the *muezzin* [the person who performs the call to prayer] coughed into the microphone and began the *azan* for the *Isha* prayer [night prayer]. (20-21)

The description of Sammar's feelings is very vivid. In this hallucination, Sammar experiences the things that she associates with Sudan and that she always yearns for, the weather, the atmosphere, and the azan. This powerful conflation of Scotland and Sudan marks the first step towards reconciliation with the former; it is for the first time in four years that Sammar feels at home in Scotland. This hallucination specifically is very significant, the narrator describes it as a vision: "[t]his had happened before but not for so long, not so deeply . . . she had never stepped into a vision before, home had never come here before" (21). This means that the hallucinations are usually shallow, such as when she conflates the sounds of the heaters' pipes with the azan (21). This suggests that previous hallucinations are a result of Sammar's longing for home, this one however, is a sort of materialisation of home that Sammar could only feel in the presence of Rae. Later, as their relationship develops, Scotland becomes familiar, the narrator explains: "Sammar walked to work through familiar streets", she adds that what was once considered strange, is now unnoticed: "[n]ow Sammar did not notice these things, did not gaze at them, alarmed, as she had done years before" (70). In this passage in the novel, Sammar seems comfortable walking in the cold. She is not afraid or weary like she was at the start of the narrative. The novel's salient depiction of the mother figure's sense of home and belonging unsettles the association between the character of the mother and the backwardness and bigotry of her country of origin which is manifested in other literary migrant narratives. It challenges the idea of the (migrant) mother having a pre-established and fixed identity which is that of a blind follower of patriarchy, who is immune to any kind of change, and who then inflicts her single-mindedness on to her daughter. But how can Sammar be a "carrier" of patriarchy when she herself is critical of it and when her sense of belonging is in flux?

In addition to the impact that Rae's love had on Sammar's experience of Scotland as a familiar space, her feelings for him alleviate her grief as well. In a dream, the narrator states:

> [Sammar] was carrying the dead, disfigured baby. He was heavy inside her and she wanted to push him out. But her aunt was there in the dream saying, you are not due yet, it is still not time to give birth. Her aunt did not know that the baby was dead, only Sammar knew because Rae had told her. She wasn't sad, she felt the baby's heaviness dragging down and the pain was familiar, not frightening, not unpleasant. She knew that her aunt was wrong, that it was time now and she would not be able to stop herself from pushing the baby out. (69-70)

The dead baby is a metaphor for Sammar's unresolved grief. The passage shows that Sammar's grief is deeply engraved inside her. Through Rae's love Sammar starts to overcome her grief. Later, she cries with Mahasen and Hanan upon her arrival in Sudan. This serves as a "reaffirm[ation] that she was who she was, Amir's mother, Tarig's widow coming home" (139). Not only is Sammar's grief resolved and her perception of Scotland changed because of Rae's love, the "paralysis" that Sammar felt for four years towards her son begins to disappear as well.

Before Sammar's relationship with Rae, the narrator explains that "[t]he part of her [Sammar] that did the mothering had disappeared" (7). However, preparing for her trip to Sudan after falling in love with Rae, the narrator highlights the difference in Sammar's feelings towards Amir saying: "the energy came, the recovery in limbs and parts of the mind that had not been used for a long time" (33). This statement suggests that when Sammar experiences love, she could reconcile with her maternal identity. After reconciling with her maternal identity, Sammar physically and emotionally reconnects with her son. The narrator says that Sammar "fell in love with Amir again. She carried him around the house, like Hanan carried her baby" (159). This clear link between Sammar's relationship with her son

and her self-fulfilment in romantic love emphasises the mode of mothering that the novel aims to convey. It means that *The Translator* does not portray a rejection of motherhood, as it is the case in other Arab/Muslim daughters' accounts. Nonetheless, the novel does not portray a romanticised view of motherhood, it rather rejects a maternal experience that denies the mother her self-fulfilment and subjectivity. In other words, on the one hand, *The Translator* defies patriarchal marginalisation of women and its desire to control their lives, on the other hand, it subverts the prototypical image of the "meek mother".

The novel ends with Sammar preparing to get married to Rae according to teachings of her Islamic faith. For Sammar, the requirements of her faith do not render her passive, subjugated, or imprisoned. Sammar's faith rather empowers her throughout the text. At the beginning when she is alienated from everything and everyone around her, during what the narrator calls "[t]he whirlpool of grief sucking time", during these times, "the only thing she could rouse herself to do was to pray the five prayers. They were the only challenge, the last touch with normality, without them she would have fallen, lost awareness of the shift of day into night" (16). On another occasion, the narrator explains that during the times when she was "dragging herself to pray, [when] even her faith sluggish . . . Allah had rewarded her even for these imperfect prayers. She had been protected from all the extremes. Pills, break-down, attempts at suicide. A barrier was put between her and things like that" (188). In their relationship, Sammar and Rae become closer to each other through their faith. Towards the very end of the text, Rae tells Sammar, "[o]urs isn't a religion of suffering . . . nor is it tied to a particular place". The narrator states that, "[h]is words made her [Sammar] feel close to him, pulled in, closer than any time before because it was 'ours' now, not hers alone. And because he understood. Not a religion of pathos, not a religion of redemption through sacrifice" (198). The way in which Islam is represented in *The Translator* as a source of strength for Sammar as well as its positive impact on Sammar and Rae's bond subvert one of

Kahf's elements of the "Victim-Escapee stereotype" that of "Rotten Religion" which characterises many texts by writers of Arab/Muslim heritage. Sammar's last words in the text in her conversation with Rae reaffirm the complex relationship that she has with Sudan, she tells him, "If I was someone else, someone strong and independent I would tell you now, I don't want to go back with you, I don't want to leave my family, I love my country too much" (198). Sudan is not the "Cruel Country" which is–reiterating Kahf's words that I mentioned earlier about the cliché of Muslim countries–"unmitigatedly woman hating".

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed *The Translator*'s rendition of the character of the migrant Arab/Muslim writer, a character which I have argued has often been side-lined in literary narratives. I argued that both the experience of motherhood and migration are presented with much nuance in Aboulela's text unsettling simplistic accounts about both experiences. Through Sammar's rejection of the motherhood that her mother-in-law, the novel's symbol of patriarchy, wants to impose on her, Aboulela differentiates between patriarchal motherhood and the experience of motherhood. This aspect of Sammar's maternal experience recalls Adrienne Rich's distinction between the institution of motherhood and mothering[23]. Sammar denounces patriarchal motherhood which is devoid of personal desires. She is not an oppressed and silent mother; she loves her son, but she expresses hate and exhaustion as well. She is also a widow who pursues love and a second marriage despite her mother-in-law's objection. Her multi-layered character challenges the simplistic tone that underlines representation of the figure of the Arab/Muslim mother who often appears as a victim/agent

[23] I have discussed Adrienne Rich's distinction between the institution of motherhood and the experience of motherhood, or mothering in the thesis introduction.

of patriarchy which means having a predetermined identity and a stereotypical role. In other words, “writing back”, Aboulela does not romanticise the portrayal the Arab/Muslim mother nor the Arab/Muslim society. She depicts a mother whose relationship with her son is hampered by a number of external factors and whose self-fulfilment and personal desires are very essential to her own wellbeing and ability to mother. However, unlike other protagonists who feature in texts by writers of Arab/Muslim heritage, Sammar’s subjectivity is attained through holding fast to her religious beliefs, to her determined quest for personal desires and rights against patriarchy, and through maintaining a strong but critical relationship with Sudan and its traditions. Aboulela depicts patriarchy but moves away from oversimplification and generalisation. She depicts a complex Arab/Muslim society–a collective and supportive society where mothering is shared with other kin. Aboulela’s protagonist develops a complex sense of belonging where feeling at home transcends her attachment to a physical geographical space. This nuanced sense of belonging defies the usual reductive depiction of the migrant mother from the daughter’s perspective where the former acts as a cultural barrier to the latter’s self-realisation and emancipation which lies in discarding tradition and religion which are not uncommonly depicted as sources of women’s oppression and backwardness.

The following chapter continues with the exploration of the idea of culture and heritage and their perception as sources of power or as a hindrance to one’s progression in Preethi Nair’s *One Hundred*. The next chapter is centred on the examination of food and the kitchen, which are as Chambers states “often the mother’s domain” (*Making Sense* 157), as symbols of cultural conflict and reconciliation between the migrant mother, who holds dear to her heart food recipes from India that are passed on to her by her mother, and her children who want to be freed from their Indian heritage.

Chapter Two: Celebrating Cooking and Matrilineage in Preethi Nair's *One Hundred Shades of White*

Introduction

The discussion of motherhood and migration in this chapter links to the discussion in the previous one. The connection between the two chapters lies in their interest in studying migrant maternal stories as they are narrated by the mother figure. They are also similar in that, in their study of these texts by migrant women of colour, they focus on the novels' resistance to misrepresentations of and stereotypes about women/mothers of colour. In the last few decades, writers interested in the dynamics of female relationships and mother-daughter relationships started to write stories from the mother's point of view in order to offer a deeper understanding of the maternal. This chapter focuses on the story of Nalini, a migrant maternal character in Preethi Nair's *One Hundred Shades of White*. The text is a matrifocal narrative that narrates the migratory journey and the life of a family which migrates from India to Britain. This chapter examines the representation of a migrant mother's journeys of motherhood and migration. As we will see in the discussion, cooking, food, and eating habits are central themes in the novel; they are vital to the development of all the events. Through addressing the centrality and the interrelatedness of these themes, the chapter examines Nalini's experience of motherhood as a migrant mother of migrant children, her journey towards subjectivity, and her construction of a hybrid identity. Since the chapter is concerned with the study of a maternal figure's journey of migration, migrant identity, and subjectivity, it also addresses the role of other maternal figures and matrilineage in the life of Nalini and her daughters, more specifically her first daughter Maya.

This chapter examines the aforementioned themes of female and maternal subjectivity, female migrant identity construction, and matrilineage in order to demonstrate the novel's subversion of reductionist representations of "Third World" women in general and Indian women and mothers in particular. Similar to *The Translator*'s discussion in chapter one, *One Hundred*, also, will be addressed as a novel that challenges labels of the victimised, oppressed, self-sacrificial–which implies lacking subjectivity–Indian mother. These labels can be considered part of an Orientalist and imperialist ideology, dating back to the British colonial era. These Orientalist and imperialist ideologies reduce the woman/mother of colour to the image of a victim of an inherently patriarchal society and traditions. This chapter examines the novel's problematisation of the notions of maternal devotion and domesticity. These notions have for long been seen through a simplistic lens which associates them with women's oppression and backwardness. After the introduction of this chapter, and a brief background about the writer and the novel, I provide a brief explanation of the spread of stereotypes against Indian women in the British colonial rhetoric and subsequently in 19th century Victorian literature which can be considered the underpinnings for reductionist views on Indian women.

The chapter shows that in her resistance of reductionist and hegemonic stereotypes about Indian women and mothers, Nair does not resort to the rejection of the maternal role. She rather celebrates the maternal and depicts its potential in empowering her female characters. In order to demonstrate the novel's celebration of the maternal as a source of female empowerment, the chapter scrutinises the text's depiction of ancestral female heritage. The most prominent element of female heritage that the novel portrays and that the chapter studies is cooking. Therefore, the chapter starts with the study of the kitchen as a space in which female relationships and solidarity are created and maintained. It examines the novel's representation of Nalini's pickle business as the source of her achievement of financial

independence. The study of the kitchen–and by extension–cooking and food as sources of female power, solidarity, and agency alters the reductionist view of the kitchen as a passive domestic space. This portrayal of the kitchen, cooking, and food where they transcend their typical conception as domestic non-creative spaces/chores calls for the blurring of the line that divides public and domestic spheres. In migrant literary narratives, such as *One Hundred*, and *Anita and Me*–which will be touched upon later in the discussion–this skill is intrinsic to the representation of matrilineage, female solidarity, and power. The chapter investigates how food and cooking are used in Nair's novel to reflect the major themes of the story such as: female solidarity and subjectivity, migrant parent/child conflict and reconciliation, and migrant identity construction.

The chapter also tackles the importance of food in Nalini's maternal experience as a migrant mother raising migrant children and in the construction of her migrant identity. Because of its importance in Nalini's and her children's experience of migration, food will be examined as a cultural marker. Studying food as a cultural marker entails addressing it as a source and a symbol of cultural conflict as well as of reconciliation between the migrant mother and her children. In her early days as a migrant, cooking is delineated as Nalini's refuge from the strangeness of England. Through cooking, she engages in nostalgic communications that keep her close to her mother, to her past, and to the India she left behind[24]. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of "mimicry", I will look at the importance of food and cooking in representing the cultural conflict between Nalini who endeavours to stick to her Indian culture, and her young children who desire to conceal their Indianness and be acknowledged as British. In addition to the use of Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" to discuss

[24] Nostalgic communication is a term used by Roger C. Aden, professor of speech communication at Ohio University to refer to a strategy used by nostalgic people who escape to their past when the present makes them feel uncertain.

the novel's representation of migrant identities, the conflict between the British and the Indian culinaries will also be seen as a conflict between power relations in light of Judith Butler's "subjectivation". Both concepts will be used to explain the process of experimenting with food fusion in the novel which symbolises Nalini's negotiation and acquisition of a hybrid identity. Disucssing food as a central theme in *One Hundred* and as a signfier of migrant parent-child conflict and reconciliation, I read this aspect of the representation of the culinary alongside another British Indian text, *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal, to highlight the similarities and differences between both works and the way in which they both dealt with the role of food in negotating (maternal) migrant subjectivities.

The dual narrative voice indicates the novel's celebration of female relationships and intersubjectivity. As explained above, celebrating matrilineal relationships and maternal heritage is a vehicle through which women writers of colour challenge clichéd discourses and misrepresentations. The final section of the chapter, thus, is concerned with the study of matrilineage and its significance in the novel. The chapter looks at matrilineage as an ambivalent, transcultural, and transnational bond which complicates the representation of female relationships and the image of the maternal. In its study of matrilineage as a source of female power, the chapter examines the mother-daughter reconciliation between Nalini and Maya whose relationship, as we will see, is characterised by conflict. Matrilineage is presented as an anchor in the migrant characters' relationship with the country of origin. The matrilineal bond in the novel bears an enormous cultural significance where the characters' attachment to and distance from the other female relatives reflect their level of attachment to the county of origin/heritage. To study its importance in the female migrant identity construction, the depiction of matrilineage in *One Hundred* will be compared to its representation and significance in *Anita and Me* and in Andrea Levi's *Fruit of the Lemon*– two migrant literary narratives in which the representation of matrilineage is parallel to that

in *One Hundred*. The chapter finally attends to the legacies of maternal figures in characters' self-fulfilment and subjectivity. This is realised through exploring the role that mother figures' heritage plays in the success of Nalini's as well as Maya's food and sewing businesses.

The study of Nalini's journey towards subjectivity, her maternal experience, and her migrant identity construction situates the current research within the larger body of literary criticism that discusses complex representations of motherhood resisting simplistic constructions. In addition to the study of a complex representation of migrant motherhood, this chapter also contributes to the growing discussion of the importance of food in migrant literary texts and in the representation of migrant mothers and matrilineage. Examining food as a creative skill and the kitchen as an active space that inspires female power and subjectivity, the chapter rejects reductionist views of food, cooking, and the kitchen and offers a nuanced representation of migrant motherhood and migrant female identities.

1. Background About the Author and Short Summary of the Novel

Before becoming a writer, Nair first worked as a management consultant. Getting her first novel *Gypsy Masala* published was in itself an adventure that reflects her sense of resilience and passion for writing. In an essay entitled "Making up the Rules", Nair tells the story of her success which started with repeated failures to place her work at various publishing houses. She, therefore, decided to establish her own PR and publishing company. Pru Menon was Nair's alter ego who enthusiastically publicised *Gypsy Masala* and arranged a good number of interviews for Nair. Eventually, the novel was revised and published by HarperCollins under a three-book deal. *One Hundred Shades of White* came as a result of a good friend's advice for Nair to write about her own story and experiences instead; it was part of the three-book deal along with a fictionalised narrative of Nair's publishing adventure entitled *The Colour of Love* (Nair, "Making up the Rules").

One Hundred narrates the story of Nalini; the daughter of the village's most famous cook and a renowned one herself. After getting married to Raul, the son of one of the wealthiest families in their village, the couple migrates to Mumbai and after that to England. Once in England, Raul's work trips to the US become more frequent. Not long after their arrival, Nalini discovers that he is a bigamist, married in the US and has another wife and children. When Raul disappears, Nalini is left jobless, with debts, and with two children Satchin eight years old, and Maya six. With the help of her Irish friend Maggie and her son Tom, Nalini then starts working at a sewing factory and after that, she begins experimenting with selling pickles. As a result of her pickle business' success, Nalini becomes financially stable and independent.

2. The Indian Woman as the "Orient"

As I mentioned in the chapter's introduction, the current discussion investigates the ways in which *One Hundred* resists long-standing stereotypes against women from the "Third World" in general, and Indian women and mothers specifically. To achieve this goal, the chapter scrutinises the novel's representation of a complex maternal figure and a nuanced matrilineal bond and its heritage.

The image of the oppressed, secluded, and victimised woman who lives in an inherently patriarchal culture, in need of the white man's–and woman's–rescue was propagated in British colonial discourse in the nineteenth century. In *Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women's Writing*, Elizabeth Jackson asserts that during the British colonial rule in India, one of the strategies used by British imperialism to justify its colonialism was to propagate the idea that Indian women were oppressed and in need of salvation. She adds that during the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries "argued that the moral inferiority of Indians was demonstrated by their barbaric treatment of women" (4). This means that at that time, even religious discourse followed a colonial rhetoric that used the situation of women as a justification for colonialism.

This rhetoric of the oppressed, uncivilised, victimised woman has been adopted and propagated by many people and discourses including Western feminist writers. Regarding British feminists' role in perpetuating stereotypes against Indian women, Antoinette Burton explains that to offer a "'proof' of women's fate in cultures where female emancipation went unrecognized", Victorian and Edwardian feminist writers used the image of "'Oriental' women as prisoners of the harem, suffocated by religious custom and at the mercy of brutish husbands" (63). As an example of a feminist writer's stereotypical description of Indian women, Burton mentions Gertrude Torrey who urges her readers to think about the Indian

woman who lives "the life of the caged odalisque, robbed of all her womanly rights and even of her reason and her soul" (qtd. in 66). Burton claims that the main topics of discussion in the feminist writing of the time are "Eastern wives, widows, and mothers", and a reductionist view of "Eastern women's domestic space" in contrast to the "the public sphere in Britain as 'civilized' and 'clean'" (73-4). The examples that Burton provides as emblematic of the portrayal of the Indian woman suggest that Indian women are considered part of a homogeneous group referred to as "Eastern women". In this group, women from different backgrounds, regardless of their differences fit only because they are not "white". Burton also highlights that the gendered roles of wifehood, widowhood, and motherhood in the Indian context are considered by Western feminists as the roots of Indian women's oppression and backwardness.

Similarly, in her analysis of texts published "on the Zed Press Women in the Third World series", Chandra Talpade Mohanty reveals that "a homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an "average Third World woman." She continues explaining that in those writings, "[the] Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "Third World" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)". Mohanty then, like Burton, asserts that these representations are created "in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions" (21-2). Burton and Mohanty's examples indicate that the fact that these discourses have reduced women to such a reductionist and simplistic

image, ignoring their differences and disregarding local women's activists' struggle against patriarchy, they become compliant with the colonial and imperialist agendas.

One might wonder why stereotypes originating in the nineteenth century can be considered crucial or even relevant to the current study. The answer to this question can be found in one of Said's interviews. Regarding stereotypes against people from the "Third World", Said contends that a person from the "East" is considered "[a] timeless Orient, as if the Orient is unlike the West, it doesn't develop, it stays the same . . . placid and still, and you know, eternal" ("Edward Said on Orientalism"). The above descriptions, attributes, and stereotypes against the Indian woman can be viewed as part of an Orientalist construction of Indian women that continues to appear in certain representations today. Avtar Brah asserts that colonial discourses about India and its cultures abound with representations of the Indian family as "the bearer" of Indian cultures and of the "Indian women as ruthlessly oppressed creatures who must be saved from their degradation" (73). She adds that "[t]there would seem to be a remarkable continuity between the imperial discourses about Asian women and those which construct Asian women's experience in post-World World II Britain". For Brah, "[m]any contemporary academic, political and popular discourses on Asian women also present them as 'docile' and 'passive' victims, both of archaic 'traditional' customs and practices, and of domineering Asian men". Brah describes this negative and simplistic representation of the Indian family as "pathologis[ation]" whereby the family becomes "the main site of problems faced by Asian women" (74).

It is useful, after presenting the stereotypes that Western colonial, feminist, and what can be referred to as neo-colonial and neo-Orientalist discourses have spread about Indian women, to provide a counternarrative to those reductive discourses. Sam Naidu argues that "[f]or women writers of the South Asian diaspora, one way of constructing empowered

female subjectivities is by anchoring their central characters in secure female bonds of empathy and solidarity, or by inscribing matrilineage". She adds that "[t]hese constructions recuperate the strength and power of women within the family structure" (60). This model of writing the migrant woman and mother's story is adopted in *One Hundred* and other texts that it will be compared with such as Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*, and Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*. Although Levy is not a South Asian writer–she is of Jamaican background–her novel's depiction of the theme of migrant identity and the role of matrilineage resonate very well with those in *One Hundred* and Syal's. Syal's and Levy's texts will be compared to Nair's novel for their interest in portraying strong matrilineal relationships that promote female characters' subjectivity, self-confidence, and power. Here, motherhood and matrilineality become motifs that writers use to resist patriarchy as well as simplistic representations. This is because motherhood, as seen above, has been considered one of the main sources of women oppression in India. The similarity between the three texts in dealing with the importance of matrilineage can be considered an indication of the essential role matrilineal bonds play in migrant women's literature.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that in their representation of empowering matrilineal bonds and maternal figures, Indian women writers are cautious of depicting a romanticised image of their society or even of the relationships themselves. In Nair's narrative, for instance, the writer displays a sense of subtlety in dealing with the patriarchy which undeniably exists in the Indian society. The scenes that are most expressive of the novel's acknowledgement of patriarchy are those that portray Nalini's father's ill-treatment of her mother, and Nalini's first husband's oppression. The first scene which depicts not only Nalini's father's bad treatment of her mother but also the social patriarchal norms of the

society that they live in is the scene of Ammu's miscarriage[25]. Nalini's father's patriarchal mindset is revealed as he leaves Ammu, Nalini's mother, and Nalini a day before Ammu loses their male offspring to miscarriage[26]. This scene is repeated in various instances in the novel–at the very beginning of Nalini's first chapter (54), then in the form of memories that Nalini replays when she is first pregnant with her son Satchin (73), and the last time it is mentioned is straight after Nalini's delivery of her last child Ammu. In this scene, Nalini explains that her father, who "was always trying to kill [her] mother" (54) and who left them a day before the miscarriage (54, 135), might have come back home "[p]erhaps if my brother had lived . . . if not for me, at least for him" (135). Nalini's thought that her father might have come back to them if he knew that he has a son is representative of a patriarchal and sexist mindset. The other part of the scene that also depicts the effects of patriarchy is shown when Nalini and Ammu move to another village as a result of her father's abandonment of his family. Nalini explains the situation as follows: "[w]e had to move away because she wanted good things for me and nobody would marry me if we stayed in the village, knowing that we had been left my father" (135). This passage clearly exposes a patriarchal society that would put the blame of the destruction of the marriage on the victims and not the abuser, essentially because he is a man.

However, although it depicts patriarchy, the scene does not carry the rhetoric of the timeless female oppressed victim, it rather conveys a great sense of resistance as Nalini adds: "[m]y mother and I set up our new life and we were happy cooking together" (135). The fact that Ammu and Nalini started anew, and that they are content with their new beginning is a symbol of their resistance of certain patriarchal norms and of the label of the victim. Also, the

[25] This scene will also be used later in the discussion of the significance of the kitchen as a space of female solidarity.
[26] Being set in Kerala, South India, where Malayalam is the dominant and official language, mother is called Amma, grandmother is Ammamma, and father refers to father. Ammu is Nalini's mother's name, and she later names her youngest daughter Ammu after her own mother.

fact that Ammu leaves her village for her daughter's future might be interpreted as an act of self-sacrifice, often read as being, against the mother's self-fulfilment and sense of independence. Nonetheless, this act is portrayed as a source of intersubjectivity and success. It is this new beginning that grants Ammu and Nalini the status of very famous cooks who are invited to provide catering for important occasions and festivals in the new village. This suggests that what might be seen as self-sacrifice, generally implying lack of subjectivity, becomes a source of power. Commenting on the success of their work, Nalini says that "we gained much respect for the work we produced in the village" (59). By portraying the mother's sacrifice as a marker of a new positive beginning and as a source of power, the writer problematises the notion or the "ideal" of maternal self-sacrifice.

Nair, to use the concept I used in the first chapter, "writes back" to unrepresentative portraits by giving prominence to the female narrative voice and through the themes that centre around issues related to women. Displaying a complex matrilineal bond thus becomes one of the ways in which *One Hundred* presents Indian women's power. Matrilineage in Nair's novel is rendered complex because of its transnational and transcultural nature. Matrilineal bonds are presented as the most important element in female identity construction in migrant settings for both the mother, Nalini, and her daughter Maya. To accentuate the role of the matrilineal structure in the text, the writer chooses food, a cultural heritage passed down from one female generation to another, as a crucial element in the development of the events of the novel, and in the exploration of all the major themes of the story.

In the literature of migrants, food preparation and consumption are recurrent themes. In many literary texts, food features as a central motif. Turning points within many narratives occur when food is being prepared or served. In many migrant literary texts, food is used in the context of identity preservation or (re)construction. Since the novel under discussion is

written by a British Indian writer, it is useful to indicate the importance of food in other migrant literary narratives. Food studies is a discipline that has struggled to emerge as an independent field of study, an Anita Mannur explains. She attributes the hesitation of scholars to acknowledge the development of "food studies" to the fact that food might be regarded as a non-serious subject (10). This, however, is changing as food studies are "burgeoning . . . food has become a window into human cultures" in the last twenty years (Highfield 9). There are many migrant South Asian and Indian literary texts that are flavoured with recipes, the different steps of food making, and/or the mixing of spices. In those narratives, food plays a substantial role in representing the themes of home and belonging–it is employed to reflect migrants' quests of belonging. On one hand, through cooking traditional meals or through consuming them, characters feel connected to their countries of origin. In this case, food acts as a thread that links them to their past. On the other hand, characters express rejection of their cultural heritage and traditions or their relationship with their countries of origin through refusing to prepare and/or consume traditional meals of their ancestors.

3. The Kitchen as a Place of Power and Agency

Ruth Maxey argues that "food offers South Asian Atlantic authors the opportunity to explore a number of major themes at the same time: gender roles; family and especially matrilineal connections; regionalism; and cooking as labour, in ways which sometimes become key to socio-economic status" (*South Asian Atlantic* 164). Food thus is a tool that allows for a rich representation of themes that are essential in migrant literature. The themes mentioned by Maxey in this passage are very prominent in Nair's novel. Family relations in the novel are shaped by and reflected through the family members' relationship with food. Relationships of bonding and solidarity, which indicate cultural and generational conflicts are

perfectly expressed and symbolised through food. The novel also features food as labour that transforms Nalini's socio-economic situation.

The first instance of female solidarity in relation to food is reflected in Nalini's mother's delivery scene in the kitchen. The kitchen plays a central role in relation to female solidarity. A scene in which Nalini is still in the village with her mother demonstrates the birth of a bond between the two characters amidst a tragic incident. Nalini's mother Ammu gives birth to her second child on the kitchen floor. When Nalini helps her mother give birth, the infant dies suffocated with the umbilical cord (135). The death of Nalini's brother does not seem to be the central point in this scene despite the fact that the foetus could have survived if Nalini, helping her screaming mother out, did not "panic[] and pull[] the baby out" not realising "that the cord had wrapped itself around his neck and that he was turning blue" (135). The writer rather focuses on the relationship that instantly develops between Ammu and Nalini with Nalini assisting her mother in and after the miscarriage, Nalini says: "I made my mother hot soups of rice gruel so she would heal quickly and I resolved to help her whenever I could" (135), and the mother leaving all her past behind and moving to another village for the sake of her daughter's future. This is the first migration in Nalini's life. Ammu and Nalini walk twenty-seven kilometres until they reach another village called Collenauta where they settle (54). The kitchen here serves as a space of mother/daughter solidarity and female solidarity in general.

Further into the narrative, in London, the kitchen continues to serve as a place for female solidarity. Among the other interesting instances of female solidarity in the kitchen is the encounter between Nalini and her Irish neighbour Maggie. In this part of the novel, Maggie sits with Nalini in the kitchen and tells her about her old life, Nalini states, "[s]lowly, she began to open up and diffuse her memories with the aroma that emanated from those pickle bottles. The smells took Maggie back to her childhood in a little town in the north of

Ireland called Dara" (103-4). This scene and the ones that follow highlight the magic and the potential that food and cooking have in regard to female bonding and solidarity. Nair presents the kitchen as a place that offers these women a safe environment to confess all that which is hidden in their lives. Nalini says, "our innermost conflicts were exchanged around that kitchen table whilst I was chopping ingredients . . . We tiptoed around the very delicate parts of our lives . . . It's not that we pretended that these parts of our lives never existed but we never probed, and waited for the other to freely surrender the information" (107). When discussing the relationship between Maggie and Nalini, Christine Vogt-William refers to the kitchen as a "space with a certain significance for their mutual confidence" (149). The kitchen thus is a place where these migrant women gather, remember the past, and seek healing from past sufferings through confessions. Both women have secrets that they have kept hidden from their children for a long time. The kitchen offers them the safety to disclose these secrets in an atmosphere rendered very intimate with the aromas released from spices and other ingredients.

This perception of the kitchen as a space with multiple significances alters the traditional view that looks at the kitchen as a passive domestic space where women practice the duty of feeding their family members. In *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies*, Barbara Haber and Arlene Voski Avakian tackle many issues related to food and cooking from a feminist point of view. They argue that up until the publication of their book, studying food in relation to women and from a feminist perspective was under-examined. Given its centrality in women's lives, Avakian and Haber argue that in feminist scholarship, what is emphasised in the study of food is the different consumption disorders and food pathologies. They further explain that topics like domesticity and housekeeping gained the attention of feminist scholars, while food was not scrutinised, "as if it was merely a marker of patriarchal oppression" (2). However, those ideas are challenged in literary texts that shed

light on the power of cooking and, by extension, food. Maxey claims that "for many immigrant women in South Asian Atlantic literature, cooking is simply part of everyday life. Sometimes it is even a necessary component in their psychological survival" (*South Asian Atlantic* 165). Women in those texts seek refuge in cooking as it keeps them connected to their countries of origin and to each other. This altered vision shows that for migrant women and mothers, the kitchen is a place that empowers them rather than simply being a place of mechanical culinary production. The kitchen becomes the place where migrant women socialise, construct, and reconstruct their own identities. In *One Hundred*, Nair subverts the perception of the kitchen as a passive mechanical space by attributing empowering potential to this space and to what is produced inside it. Among the qualities that she attributes to the kitchen is female power and agency.

Throughout the narrative and in different locations and phases of her life, Nalini experiences happiness, sadness, deception, and uncertainty. What is always stable and what signifies an anchor in her life is cooking. In the novel, food and spices appear to possess magical powers. Speaking about her mother, Nalini states, "[m]y mother would watch situations and then prescribe accordingly" (55-6). What Ammu offers are specific dishes or spices, here we see that Nalini ascribes healing powers to food. The ability to cure disease, change a bad temper, and soften the hardest hearts (55) are only some of the powers that food has. This mastery of cooking offers Nalini and her mother a special recognition in their village, as if their cooking is magical. Describing the crucial role that cooking plays in Ammu's and Nalini's lives, and even in the lives of the villagers, Nalini says, "[a]s we were hired out for village festivals, births and marriages, things in the village began to change: a new temple, renewed rainfall, and laughter. It was almost as if my mother turned the inability to mend her own life outwards and seeing the pleasure this produced fixed her in some way. She took pride in her work and it showed" (56). This means that cooking is both a source of

income and of reputation for Nalini and Ammu who are known as rescuers of helpless people. This makes the kitchen a space that engenders women's power and self-realisation.

Similarly, in her migratory experience, food appears as Nalini's anchor. Arriving in England, Nalini does not speak English. She is presented to readers as a young mother who is totally dependent on her husband. Clinging to the idea that she will not stay in England for more than one year, Nalini does not feel the need to learn the language. Sandra Vlasta contends that Nalini's initial refusal to learn English is in a way a means of self-reassurance that her stay in England is temporary. Vlasta states that Nalini "prefers to depend on translators and tries to have as little contact as possible with the actual environs in order to continue living in their new home the way they did in the old one, before migration" (77). This indicates Nalini's fear of losing her old self; it alludes to a migrant's fear of disintegrating and losing her cultural identity. Nalini feels frustrated especially as she sees her children's adaptation to the British culture. Maya says that her mother thinks England "was making [Maya] do things that even she couldn't understand" (25-6). This fear for her daughter's loss of her Indian ethnic background explains Nalini's refusal to learn English. Yet, when she eventually decides to learn it, she uses food as a medium for her language acquisition. Thus, food and cooking here function as tools for adaptation to the host culture. Learning English is the first decision Nalini takes in her migrant identity construction process. Because of her husband's constant absence, she starts to learn English by exchanging food for new English words. Tom, Maggie's son, is the person appointed by Nalini's first husband to buy groceries for Nalini before he leaves her. Nalini gives Tom boxes of traditional Indian food that she makes and her children refuse to eat. After some time Nalini starts exchanging these boxes for new words that Tom teaches her. For every

meal Tom takes, he would teach Nalini new words or sentences. Speaking about this exchange, Nalini says:

> [he] came religiously every week and I filled containers of food for him. It would have been wasted otherwise. This made me look forward to his visits, even though he had fingernails like the tree climber. Every time he came, he taught me a new word or sentence: 'This, Mrs K, is called a pumpkin and this is a marrow …' Containers were exchanged in this way and a year later, I could understand him and give him whole sentences back as well. (83)

The use of the word religiously is very significant in the passage above, it indicates the level of seriousness and commitment both Nalini and Tom accord to these exchanges which can be referred to as cultural encounters. This means that food is central in Nalini's experience of migration. It helps her mediate the cultural differences between her and the locals– symbolised here in Tom and his fingernails. Contact with Tom is Nalini's first initiative of interaction with the British culture and society.

Being in financial need, after her husband's disappearance, Nalini is obliged to work outside. With the help of Maggie, Nalini starts working in a sewing factory (91). This job, however, deprives her of spending time with her children. She is discouraged by the sight of older women going on the bus with her every day. She says: "[t]he women piled onto the bus as usual. Some of them were in their forties and fifties, looking defeated, old and dishevelled. That could be me in twenty years' time so used to my life that I dare not dream, except anything from it but mere survival" (96). The way Nalini describes her colleagues at work shows that she feels that this job is restricting, if not suffocating. This gives readers a glimpse into Nalini's subjectivity. Her thoughts suggest that she is changing from being dependent on

her husband to aspiring for a job that offers not only financial freedom but also a job that she enjoys doing and that does not restrict her freedom and ambition. The two motivations behind Nalini's conviction that the factory job is not for her are, her ambition and her children. Unsatisfied with her job, Nalini considers Tom's suggestion of starting a pickle business instead of working at the factory. He advises Nalini to start a small pickle business where she prepares pickles, and he would deliver them to his customers (95). Nalini wants a job that as Tom says will help her "make much more money from home" and as Maggie says, one that enables her to "be there for [her] children when they came back from school" (96). Nalini accepts her friends' suggestion and she decides to start making and selling pickles. Following her decision, Nalini think to herself, "I remember feeling so elated and free, like I could do anything, be anyone if I chose to be" (97). This quote indicates that cooking, which Avakian and Haber, as seen above, argue can be thought of as a source of women's oppression, is the source of Nalini's agency and subjectivity.

As I mentioned previously, among the themes that are discussed in South Asian diasporic literature in relation to food is cooking as labour. One of the fundamental discussions that surround the theme of food is the gendered division of the private versus public spheres. I consider what Uma Narayan describes as, "[t]he seeming mundaness of food, its connections to the body, and its gendered linkage to the women's work in the domestic" (161-2), to be the reason behind the biased gendered division of labour in relation to food and cooking. The easy association of women's cooking with the domestic sphere insinuating banality encourages a hierarchical view of women and men's cooking especially that, as Maxey explains, chefs "are more likely to be male than female" (*South Asian Atlantic* 170). The biased hierarchical perception of women's and men's cooking helps sustain the sharp boundaries between the private and the public sphere and nurtures the construction of the domestic realm as inferior to the public domain. Television, for instance, "has long lifted

male chefs–for men are almost always chefs where women are home cooks–to celebrity heights. In the hands of a man, cooking becomes a skill and an art form instead of duty, which it often is for women" (Kamal 24). The negative limiting perception of women's cooking might be considered a contribution to the negative perception of the kitchen as a space that is connected with women's confinement and lack of creativity and agency. This idea is also addressed by Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry. She refers to the debate of whether the kitchen as a female-only space is oppressive and restraining to women's creativity and freedom or it could be a space that rather allows for women's power and agency. She also mentions that in the debate over the position of the kitchen in women's lives, it is argued that, potentially, in order to disable the patriarchal effects of the kitchen it should either be shared between women and men, or it should be completely "destroyed" (139). Kamal's and Le Dantec-Lowry's ideas about men and women's cooking suggest that generally women's cooking is regarded less creative and less important compared to male's cooking. In *One hundred* the line that divides the private from the public is gradually blurred until it completely disappears.

The kitchen is presented as a source of power that transforms a mother's life and grants her self-sufficiency and agency. After she decides to start selling pickles, Nalini enthusiastically prepares them at home with everyone around her participating in the process. Proud and satisfied with the pickle preparation Nalini says: "[t]here was a ripple of excitement as I chose the fruits and spices from the market stalls" (94). All that which Nalini prepares is done inside the kitchen and other parts of the house, yet the outcome is delivered outside to customers. As I mentioned above, this new job of selling pickles grants Nalini a sense of agency that she could not attain through her previous job at the factory. The change is momentous and Nalini wants to celebrate it and remember it with her children "[w]e walked back home, holding each other's hands, and we stopped off at a photo booth to

capture the moment so it would last forever" (97). By giving the kitchen and cooking this power, Nair re-examines the belief that confines female subjectivity to women quitting the domestic and working outside the house. Nalini feels more satisfied, in control, and whole doing something that allows her to thrive which is cooking. This potential that Nair accords to cooking indicates that what matters for Nalini as a woman is not actually *where* she works but rather *what* she does and how satisfying it is.

The scenes that capture the dismissal of the division between public and private spheres the most are those that depict Nalini's house as a workplace. The place where Nalini lives after her husband's departure is very small. Soon after she starts selling a considerable amount of pickle jars, the place turns into a small factory. Nalini explains the change in her flat saying: "[s]oon, the bedside was full of brightly-coloured mangoes and lemons, spices and bottles. We had a whole system going and Maggie would squeeze into the room and help with the labelling and packing" (95). On a different occasion, Maya describes the atmosphere around the house stating: "[w]e lived with a whole family of pickles, there were hundreds of them, everywhere you went there was a pickle jar" (154). The fact that the house, a private space, becomes a workplace is one possible way of looking at the novel's subversion of the binarism between private and public spheres. The task of preparing the pickles, at home and in Nalini's shop, is shared between men (Nalini hires other men and women to help her out in her shop's kitchen), women, and even Nalini's children are given small tasks and are taking part in this business. However, it is Nalini, a woman, who is the owner of the business and the one who creates the pickle recipes. Also, as we have already seen in the quotes above and as it will become even more clear, Nalini's cooking is an art whether she performs it at home or in the shop. This celebration of women's cooking throughout the narrative challenges the general assumption discussed by Kamal above about the inferiority of women's cooking compared to their male counterparts. The other way of addressing the text's rejection of the

private/public division is through examining the pickle shop's work atmosphere. While Nalini's house appears as a workplace, her shop has a rather "homely" ambience. The way that the shop's aura is described as a safe haven, and the manner in which the customers are described also indicate that the writer ascribes properties that are usually associated with the feeling of "being at home" to Nalini's shop.

Speaking about her customers, Nalini explains that "[t]he shop was like a magnet that drew many broken hearts . . . All entered with an air of certainty. Unknown to them, the sound of the chimes and the various smells disarmed them and made them feel safe, they felt secure in the store and they didn't even know it" (128). Similarly, Maya's description of the customers and the time that they spend in the shop also shows that the shop becomes a safe place where customers seek and expect more than jars of pickles. She says that "[i]t was a hang-out for lots of blue-rinse oldies who would stand there talking for hours about hip replacements . . . Another excuse to prolong their conversation by talking about my height or my hair" (172). The quotes show that the customers are attached to the shop and that they enjoy being there for long periods of time. Here, the shop transcends its function as a business place. It becomes a safe and secure haven where customers open up about their lives. The scenes that demonstrate the customers' comfort and openness in the shop are relatable to the quote that is mentioned earlier which reveals Maggie and Nalini's comfort, safety and openness in the kitchen. What links both instances of consolation is that these feelings are stimulated by the "magical" effects of food. In discussing what "being at home" usually means for people, sociologist Jan Willem Duyvendak states that in popular discourse, feeling at home is often thought of as the feelings of being "at ease", "safe", "secure" and "comfortable" (27). These feelings that Duyvendak states can be compared to those of Nalini's customers. Therefore, taking into consideration the generally assumed significance of "being at home", one can argue that the shop's customers feel "at home" in Nalini's shop.

The kitchen and cooking which are generally associated with domesticity–alluding to passivity and confinement–are seen in a completely different light.

The complex representation of these two concepts, food and cooking, rejects simplistic discussions and representations around them. However, the power of the kitchen does not end here. In addition to the flourishment of Nalini's business, food is the reason for her encounter with her second husband Ravi, food then becomes a creator and maintainer of love. Nalini first meets with Ravi when he hires her several times to cook for his business guests before he asks for her hand for marriage. Their relationship develops through food, Nalini states: "[w]e continued to see each other once or twice a month . . . The two of us would sit, eat together and talk" (155). This means that the writer connects many aspects of Nalini's life to food which time and again emphasises its importance. Another crucial position that food occupies in the novel is being a symbol and a source of cultural and generational conflict and reconciliation between Nalini and her children.

4. Food as a Site of Conflict and of Rescue

Food features as a thread that connects migrants with their home cultures in many migrant literary texts. As mentioned above, it is portrayed as a cultural marker in the representation of migrant identities. Food is perceived as a site of reference to migrant characters. In many cases, the food that characters choose to prepare or eat reflects their identities and it also shows how attached or detached they are from their country of origin/heritage. When she discusses food and its relationship with matrilineage in Nair's novel along with Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), Christine Vogt-William claims that "cooking is the practice used to address cultural negotiations while eating or refusal to eat is a metaphor for cultural acceptance and transformation or outright

rejection" (119). Nair deploys food as a metaphor for the acceptance or rejection of culture. Similarly, Maxey states that "[w]riters also use food to illustrate the tension between preserving one's ancestral heritage and the formation of new cultural and social identities" (*South Asian Atlantic* 164). Commonly, migrant writers use food to represent characters' cultural dilemmas and the changes that their identities undergo in their migratory journeys. Characters who do not feel that they belong to the country they immigrate to tend to be extremely protective of the identity markers of the home culture. While those who are more open to be part of the new society tend to adopt the cultural values of that country. Food is one of those cultural markers that is considered a contested area of conflict in many literary texts.

In *One Hundred*, Nair uses food as a reflection of the characters' ethnic identities. As soon as Nalini's children Satchin and Maya arrive in England they start negotiating their identities. They start adopting different aspects of the English culture as substitutions for Indian ones. Maya explains this saying:

> [a]t prayer time, when Amma woke us to pray to the Goddess, she would just manage to say the few first words . . . when I would suddenly cut in with the Lord's Prayer . . . When she prepared for Onam and told us some king story, I interrupted with the story about the king who asked his daughters how much he loved them. When she cooked Indian food, I insisted on something else. (51)

This passage illustrates Maya's endeavour to detach herself from and to abandon all that which is Indian and acculturate to that which is English. In this extract, the writer shows that Maya wants to change many cultural aspects of her ethnic identity, as they relate to her religion, storytelling, and, finally and most importantly, food. Later in the narrative, the

dominant cultural aspect that most conflicts revolve around is food. Food becomes a source of clash between Nalini and her children. Before tackling food as a site of conflict between the mother and her children, I will show its centrality in Nalini's identity reconstruction. At the beginning of the narrative and before she starts being part of the English society, Nalini would cook only traditional Indian food. Even when she starts the pickle business, the ingredients she chooses are those used to reproduce typical Indian traditional pickles.

However, after she begins to feel more confident in her preparations, she starts exploring new possibilities. Nalini speaks about her decision to venture in new combinations of ingredients saying, "the mango and lime pickles were doing very well and I decided it was time to introduce new range: apple, cinnamon and chilli. Ripe, sober English apples blended with a mixture of temperamental chillies . . . In those bottles there was a perfect combination of stable West and fiery Eat" (108). The way Nalini describes the ingredient combination echoes her openness or flexibility to accept blending the two cultures. Nalini's openness to Englishness is also manifested in the fact that she starts watching TV with her children and she goes with them to watch movies in the cinema (101). To show how enclosed Nalini is in her culture at the beginning of the narrative, Nair uses food as a means to display this idea of characters holding firmly to their culture of origin and closing all doors to the culture of the new country. Then when Nalini starts demolishing the solid walls that she builds around herself and her children early in the narrative, she decides to venture into food fusion.

When commenting on Nalini's experimentation with new pickles, Vlasta links Nalini's success in accepting cultural "fusion" to the constant preparation of pickles and the effect the odours of the ingredients have on her. She asserts that Nalini took an active role in this change and that the changing process was all under her control "[s]he accepts this fusion in an active way as she herself creates the recipes, as she herself decides on the ingredients, the taste, and the texture of the chutney". Thus, food is used as a signifier for Nalini's level of

acceptance of the English culture in her life. Concerning identity formation, Vlasta claims that the fact that Nalini experiments in the preparation of pickles when her children are not in the house suggests that Nalini is responsible only for her own identity construction and that the children "will have to create their own life stories in migration" (115). I, however, believe that Nalini is also presented as an active agent in her children's identity construction. In fact, Nalini succeeds in acquiring a complex identity as an attempt to cultivate it in her children. She acquires this new identity through experimentation in food in order to preserve her children's Indianness. This suggests that two concepts that can be associated with female subjugation and patriarchy are what help a migrant woman achieve a transnational hybrid identity: motherhood and cooking.

The small changes that Nalini introduces to her Indian dishes are not present only in pickle preparations. As a migrant mother who aspires to instil in her children a sense of connection to their Indian heritage, Nalini finds herself obliged to be flexible when preparing her children's food. Early on in the narrative Satchin and Maya felt embarrassed by the food that Nalini puts in their lunch boxes. They then start rebelling against their mother's food by opting for English foods like toast and fish and chips rather than masalas and curries. Nalini speaks about the conflict that exists between her and her children regarding food, saying, "I cooked huge meals and place them on the dining table. From morning to night . . . Nobody ate what I made . . . Every day I got instructions from them to make new English foods" (82). What we can see here is that the writer employs food as a marker of characters' affiliations with both Indian and English cultures. Nalini cooks and consumes Indian dishes because she wants to remain closely attached to her Indian culture, whereas her children

express not only their acceptance of English culture, but also their rejection of Indian culture, by refusing the food that their mother makes.

In Nair's novel, cultural conflicts and negotiations are manifested through food. Nalini wants to preserve Indian culture in her children through food, and when her children want to refute it, they resort to the same means. Nalini makes huge efforts to preserve the Indian culture for her children as she sees the change that they are going through. Clearly, the influence that the children's outside world has on them is threatening to Nalini. Nalini refers to the conflict that she has with her children as a battle. Since the children refuse to eat Indian food, Nalini has to create a hybrid kind of food. She starts cooking English meals flavoured with Indian spices. When her children ask for omelette and toast, she "beat the eggs with coriander leaves, added half a chilli, crushed peppercorns and onions, and toasted the bread on the cheenachatti with ghee. They complained about the 'green bits'; it felt like I was losing the battle" (82).

This decision of imitating the English food that her children want to eat does not mean that she replaces Indian food with an English counterpart in order to please her children. It means that she imitates the English cuisine but with a difference. Nalini tries to neutralise the tension between her and her children by combining culinary elements from both cultures to come up with a "hybrid" result. In doing so, Nalini still displays her power as an ethnic minority mother who cooks traditional meals in order to keep herself and her children connected to the country of origin/heritage. Nonetheless, she is at the same time "adhering" to her children's attempts of becoming "Anglicised" which they show mainly through their choice of food.

The idea of being "Anglicized" and not English is discussed by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. In this book, Bhabha introduces a concept which he calls "mimicry".

Bhabha presents mimicry as the aspiration of colonial powers to create a subject who is similar to him but different at the same time, a subject that is "*almost the same, but not quite*" (emphasis in the original 89). Bhabha here refers to the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. He claims that there is tension between the coloniser and the colonised when it comes to the desired identity of the colonial subject. The colonised inevitably wishes to maintain his/her ethnic identity, and the coloniser wants to change the colonised into subjects who resemble them. The middle ground therefore between the two conflictual ideologies is mimicry, "[w]ithin that conflictual economy of colonial discourse which Edward Said describes as the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination – the demand for identity, stasis–and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history–change, difference–mimicry represents an ironic compromise" (Bhabha 86). This means that imitating in this situation is the last resort. In order to apply this concept of mimicry to Nalini's conflict with her children, we need to understand that, in his establishment of the concept of mimicry, Bhabha highlights a paramount attribute of the concept. He emphasises the fact that mimicry offers the colonial subject the ability to challenge the colonial power and to disturb its authority. He explains the power of mimicry, arguing that "desire . . . through the repetition of partial presence, which is the basis of mimicry, articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that *menace* the narcissistic demand of colonial authority" (Bhabha emphasis added 88). We understand from this passage that the act of imitating the coloniser destabilises the colonial power. This is because the result of imitation is not identical to it and that difference diminishes its supremacy since it is flawed. Also, by being partially similar to the coloniser, the colonised gets access to the coloniser's culture. By doing so, the colonised might be able to know more than what the coloniser wants him/her to know, thus, he/she becomes a threat to the coloniser's authority and power.

Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" is relevant, in that Nalini is not cooking fully English food. In her imitation of the English food that her children want to eat as part of their newly adopted culture, there is only a "partial" presence of the children's desired food. The outcome of her fusion is an "Anglicized" but not "English" food. This idea of adopting this food fusion is best illustrated when Nalini and her children are invited for dinner in Maggie's house. Being Irish, Maggie evidently cooks British food which is considered by Nalini as foreign. The close relationship that Maggie has with the children and precisely with Maya is threatening to Nalini. After their father's disappearance, Maya starts developing a very intimate relationship with Maggie. Maggie becomes an "othermother" for Maya who draws a barrier between herself and her mother. At the beginning of this relationship, Nalini feels worried, she believes that Maggie might have a negative influence on her children, particularly Maya. Nalini thinks that if the children have constant contact with Maggie, they will become Westernised. It is here where Nalini claims back her maternal authority and interferes in Maggie's space. Nalini speaks about the roasts that Maggie prepares for their family as guests:

> she insisted that she cook a roast for us all, saying that Satchin and Maya really liked it. Before I had a chance to say no, they would be leaping up and down with excitement. So I would go upstairs on a pretext and just before she put the chicken or the meat that she was cooking into the oven, I stabbed cloves and cinnamon through it so that they would not forget the taste of home. (94)

Here Nalini does not deprive the children from visiting Maggie, although at the beginning, she is afraid of Maggie's influence on her children. Later on, when Nalini sees how happy her children are around Maggie, she exerts control over the influence that Maggie has on her

children. The mother does not prevent the children from eating the roast, which symbolises Western or British food. She rather decides to have authority over the way British culture–symbolised in its food–is presented to her children. The act of "disturbing" the authenticity of food, "stabbing" cloves and cinnamon in the roast, means the disruption of its power on Maya and Satchin.

In addition to the attribute of power that mimicry offers to the "colonised", Bhabha also stresses the fact that mimicry does not mean a denial or veiling of the colonial subject's ethnicity. Bhabha's idea of mimicry being an act of imitating with a difference and not an act of suppressing an ethnic identity or culture is comparable to the idea of food fusion in Nair's text. Nalini engages in food fusion in two distinct ways, at times, she adds Indian spices and ingredients to British food; alternatively, she does the opposite by adding British ingredients to Indian dishes. This idea is best illustrated in the "English apples" scene mentioned earlier (108). In an apple pickle, the apples are the main ingredient. This is to say that although the main ingredient in the pickle (English apples) is not so Indian, the essence is still Indian. Therefore, while Nalini uses a British ingredient, the Indianness of the preparation is not left out. This refers to the idea that in migration, the cultural traditions of characters, which are part of identity, are subject to alterations. These alterations, however, do not subdue the cultural heritage and the ethnic identity that the migrant brings with her to where she migrates. The changes that Nalini makes to the food that she prepares for her children as well as for her pickle business, and which reflect her attitude towards both cultures, are first steps for her and her children towards acquiring a hybrid identity.

This conflict between the children's desire to assimilate in the mainstream British culture and the mother's aspiration to stick to her Indian heritage can be viewed as a tension between two opposed powers. In the novel, we have a minority culture embodied in Nalini who is trying to preserve her Indian identity. In opposition to this, we have a mainstream

British culture embodied in the majority of the society, the white neighbour Maggie, and the children who are more and more inclined towards embracing it.

In a similar vein to Bhabha, Judith Butler discusses some seminal concepts with respect to resisting oppressive powers, discourses, or ideologies. In order to clarify Butler's views about "subjectivation", it is productive to pose a question that she herself raises in her discussion of the relationship between powers[27]. Butler asks: "[h]ow can it be that the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency?" She also questions whether there is a contradiction between subordination and agency (*The Psychic Life* 10). What Butler refers to here is that subordination and power are usually perceived as the ultimate opposite of independence or emancipation and agency. Her argument, however, is that the former view of power and subordination is partial; it is not a complete vision of the reality of both concepts. She does not deny the concepts' subordinating nature, yet she believes that they encompass emancipatory properties. Butler poses these questions because according to her, a subject attains agency only when they are subjected to the same power that is also their source of agency. She claims that what Michel Foucault calls subjectivation in French "assujetissement" has "[a] paradoxical character". The word according to Butler refers to both the subjugation of an individual as well as its transformation into a subject (*The Psychic Life* 83).

These questions are crucial to the present discussion of the conflict between Nalini and her children. This is because when we apply Butler's idea of subjectivation to understand what one can call the power dynamics between Nalini and her children, we find ourselves

[27] It is worth mentioning here that in many of her books and among them *Gender Trouble* and *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler tackles the relationship between the power of the heterosexual discourse and homosexuality. What is relevant for this discussion is how can an individual emerge as a gendered subject in a society dominated by a heterosexual narrative, i.e how can this subject resist and even subvert the subjection of heteronormativity.

posing the same questions that Butler asks regarding the agency of a subject. The fact that Nalini is threatened by the presence of Maggie, as explained previously in the discussion of Bhabha, and her acceptance of eating and cooking British food can be regarded as paradoxical acts. How can adhering to her children's demands and accepting the invitation of her neighbour be an act of subordination, and be the very source of her resistance and emergence as a strong subject? In order for this power that Butler refers to, to change from being subjecting to being empowering, it should be imitated and subverted.

The similarity can be seen in the fact that both scholars attribute empowering effects to totalitarian powers. In light of both perceptions, power is both subjugating and empowering. The shift in the effect that power has on the subject, according to both Bhabha and Butler, may happen when the subject imitates this very power. The act of repeating the norms of a power that one resists, therefore, is not straightforward. Similar to Bhabha's thoughts of mimicry, Butler explains her view saying: "for a copy to be subversive of heterosexual hegemony it has to both mime and displace its conventions" ("The Body You Want"). Here, Butler presents miming as a disruptive act rather than mere repetition. The potential that Butler attributes to imitation is achieved through a repetition that she refers to as reiteration. This repetition is not very different from the one that Bhabha presents; it is a repetition with a difference. Although Butler does not literally state that her reiteration is repetition with difference, it can be deduced from her discussion of the act of repetition. She emphasises the importance of the way in which one repeats, "the task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, *to displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (emphasis in original *Gender Trouble* 148). The concept of a different way of repeating the mainstream dominant norms is what is relevant to the idea of Nalini's imitation of mainstream food. In order to fully understand what Butler means by a repetition that "displace[s]" the norms, we need to look at

what she suggests as a process for the repetition of the normative gender norms to become the reason for the achievement of gender subjectivity.

Regarding Nalini, as mentioned above, she starts imitating cooking practices of the mainstream culture when she feels threatened. Hence her imitation is defined by fear of failure and uneasiness. This idea of being compelled to imitate recalls Dan Ojwang discussion of this idea of the expressiveness of food in migratory narratives saying, "[o]n the one hand, what the immigrant Indian characters in the literature eat or drink may indicate their resistance to the dominant systems that try to assimilate them, while on the other hand it may act as a sign of their capitulation to undesired cultural influences" (69). I want to argue that while at the start of mixing culinary practices, Nalini is indeed "capitulated" by what seems to be "undesired cultural influences" of her children. This, however, changes because after repeatedly mimicking over time, Nalini starts feeling more comfortable with the mixing of Indian and English culinary practices. The product of the imitation and repetition that I have tackled is an identity that is the result of the mixture of two conflicting powers: the resisted, that of her children, and the resistant one, Nalini's. I suggest then that Bhabha's and Butler's concepts emphasise repetition as the way for imitation to succeed in resisting the dominant ideology. This is relevant to the representation of the migrant mother Nalini, who is trying to resist her children's rejection of Indian culture and adoption of English practices through imitation and repetition. The first imitations that Nalini practises out of pressure from her children, change to become a decision that she takes thinking "it was time to introduce a new range" (108).

By tackling the idea of food as a symbol of cultural conflict between immigrant parents and their children, Nair places her novel within a body of diasporic literature by writers of Indian heritage whose works feature food as a central, if not as the main motif. *One Hundred* can be studied alongside British Indian Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* because of their

dealing with food as a central and a highly symbolic motif in the context of migrant literary narratives.

The way both Syal and Nair approach generational conflicts between immigrant parents and their children is very similar. Both writers introduce the parent/child cultural clashes through the metaphorical use of food, spices, and different culinary habits. The children in both stories are portrayed as being ashamed of their parents' ethnic food and eating habits. They believe that English "Fish and Chips" is superior to the spicy–read "smelly"–dishes that their mothers prepare at home. This is one of the issues tackled in many migrant narratives and which is typical to children of migrant parents. The children's quest for acceptance within a culture that is distinct from that of their heritage creates in them an urge to contradict what represents their cultural origin or heritage. Both Nair and Syal represent the anxieties surrounding cultural belonging through mother and children disputes over home-cooked Indian meals and ready-made British ones. In both novels, Indian mothers refuse to eat outside the house and they both idealise the freshly home-made dishes that they prepare and they look down on the English "Fish and Chips" that they buy from stores. They both believe that their food carries meaning as it revives memories about the country of origin and their own mothers. For instance, thinking about her mother's attachment to the Indian food that she cooks, Meena in Syal's text comments on the significance that her mother attributes to her Indian home-made food saying: "[t]his food was not just something to fill a hole, it was soul food, it was the food their far-away mothers made and came seasoned with memory and longing, this was the nearest they would get for many years, to home" (61).

Not only are the novels similar in their representation of the link between the food the mother figures cook and their memories of the mothers and the lands that they left behind,

but the novels are also parallel in their representation of the kitchen. Although not as prominent as in Nair's narrative, the kitchen is portrayed as a space for nostalgic communications with the past and the country of origin in *Anita and Me*. Daljeet, the mother character in *Anita and Me*, opens up and talks about her past life in the kitchen. It is when she is in the kitchen that she recalls her past memories and narrates them to her daughter. Meena says: "[m]y mother grew up in a small Punjabi village not far from Chandigarh. As she chopped onions for the evening meal or scrubbed the shine back onto a steel pan or watched the clouds of curds form in a bowl of slowly setting homemade yoghurt, any action with a rhythm, she would begin a mantra about her ancestral home" (34). It is clear from this passage that there is a sense of harmony between the different stages of cooking and the mother's past memories in the ancestral home; they are simply intertwined. Because of the centrality of food and the kitchen in dealing with the representation of migrant characters' dilemmas, memories, and longing for their ancestors in both Nair's and Syal's texts, their narratives can be considered as a significant contribution to the growing interest in literature and scholarship in the intersections between migrant cuisines and identities.

In *Anita and Me* culinary items are themselves signifiers of culture and of characters' negotiating a sense of migrant identity and belonging. For instance, in *Anita and Me* the oven represents English culture. The mother, Daljeet, never uses the oven or bakes cake. Meena's first encounter with using an oven is at their English neighbour's, Mrs Worral's, kitchen. Meena thinks to herself: "I'd never seen my mother use our oven, I thought it was a storage space for pans and her griddle on which she made chapatti. Punjabis and baking don't go together, I've since discovered. It's too easy, I suppose, not enough angst and sweat in putting a cake in the oven and taking it out half an hour later" (62). This quote reflects Meena's process of comparing and negotiating the English and Punjabi cultures which is fundamental to the novel's plot. Also, the fact that the daughter welcomes the idea of baking

a cake in the oven at the English neighbour's house is an indication of Meena's openness to the English culture. Corinna Assmann discusses the daughter's refusal of Indian food cooked by her mother in *Anita and Me* as a sign of the identity conflict that she has (86-87). She also refers to it as a tool for rebellion that highlights cultural and generational gaps between parents and children (Assmann 87). Food, here, features as a tool implemented by migrant writers to emphasise frustrated mothers' attempts to instil their ethnic cultures and identities in their children. At the same time, the same tool is used by children to retaliate against their mothers' will.

However, what is distinguishable about Nair's text is the narrative point of view. The story in Nair's novel is told from the daughter's as well as the mother's perspectives. Unlike in many migrant novels where the mother's voice is lost to that of their daughters, in *One Hundred* readers see the story from Nalini's and Maya's points of view. In Syal's narrative nonetheless, the story is told from Meena's standpoint; she is the protagonist and the narrator of the story. All events in Syal's novel are seen through Meena's lens, including the perspectives of her mother and grandmother. In this regard, Marianne Hirsch argues that the mother-daughter relationship is generally told by the daughter (16). Similarly, Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy claim that "even in women's accounts of motherhood, maternal perspectives are strangely absent. We most often hear daughter's voices in both literary and theoretical texts about mothers, mothering, and motherhood, even those written by feminists who are mothers" (1). Although the novel begins and ends with Maya's voice and the narrative voice alternates between the mother and her daughter throughout the text, we feel that Nalini's tale is deeper.

The above brief discussion of some of the key similarities and differences between *One Hundred* and *Anita and Me* indicates that what distinguishes Nair's narrative from Syal's text is the migrant mother's migratory experience narrated from the perspective of both the

mother and her daughter. This dual narrative mode offers a deeper engagement with the representation of food as a symbol of cultural and generational conflict and reconciliation in migrant narratives. Also, this alternating narrative voice between the mother and the daughter accentuates the importance of matrilineage and female intersubjectivity, and reclaims the maternal perspective which has for long been denied and silenced.

5. *One Hundred Shades of White* and Matrilineage

Matrilineage is central to the story of *One Hundred* and it seems to be very important in the author's life as well. Nair starts her novel by dedicating it to her own grandmother: "[f]or Ammamma, who loved us enough to let us go". This suggests that her grandmother has a significant place in her life. Historically the Nair family of Kerala, the author's state of origin, is acknowledged as a matrilineal family that comes from a caste which holds female ancestors to a high standard (Bhanu 1522). This might suggest that the source of influence for Nair is her own experience as a woman who comes from a culture where female ancestors are attributed high status. Female ethnic minority writers are known for their nuanced portrayal of matrilineage. In this regard, Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly state that "[s]cholars point to the fact that some of the most sustained and challenging matrifocal narratives are found in traditions involving writers and subjects from minority or marginalized communities and relationships" (10).

Matrilineage is represented both thematically and in terms of the choice of the narrative voice. The dual narrative voice accentuates the matrilineal relationship and its role in the construction of strong interrelated sleves. Yi-Lin Yu associates this coexistence of the two narrative voices with intersubjectivity. She writes "the literary representations of mother-daughter voices in contemporary matrilineal narratives, in particular, open up a new chapter

in the recent feminist development of repositioning maternal subjectivity from a feminist liberal individualistic stance–mothers as individuals and subjects of their own–to that of a feminist intersubjective one" (179). The argument that Yu puts forward is that more recent literature of mother/daughter relationship is equally concerned with the subjectivity or agency of both the mother and daughter characters. This, for her, promotes intersubjectivity rather than individuality. This view of mothers and their relationship with their daughters considers the female subject as part of a lineage. The female members of the lineage gain power and self-recognition from their belonging to this maternal ancestry.

The scene that is most expressive of this idea of intersubjectivity is when Nalini states that she writes letters and tells her children that it is Ammamma who sends them to preserve the children's relationship with their grandmother and their country of heritage India. She says: "I was desperate to recount stories of their grandmother; I even wrote letters from her pretending she had sent them, but when I tried to think of other ways to remind them of home, my imagination usually failed me and Maya would continue the stories" (93). This scene describes a kind of continuity and solidarity that exist between the mother and her daughter. It is about the unity, despite difference and conflict, of the voice of the mother and her daughter. This is very different from the domination of the daughters' narrative voice which often results in the suppression of the mother's voice and subjectivity. This scene is recounted by the narrative voice of the mother and it is celebratory of the act of harmony that Maya initiates when her mother is unable to finish a story. The intersubjectivity here manifests in that both characters tell the same story in different voices. Because the story is about the grandmother, Maya does not allow the story to be interrupted and she continues the narration, the voice of the daughter thus becomes a continuation of that of her mother's. It is also presented as a symbol of the continuity of the matrilineal bond. Here we also see Nalini's urge to keep the figure of the grandmother alive in her children's minds and in hers

as well. Despite the physical distance between her and her mother, Nalini's mother Ammu is always present in her life. Nalini recalls memories of her mother when they were together in India. For her, these memories are the thread that connects her to India and to the past that she refuses to forget. She connects to her mother through the food that she cooks, and she remembers her in happy days as well as in sad ones.

The representation of matrilineage in *One Hundred* complicates the representation of the maternal and of female relationships and solidarity. Matrilineal bonds play a crucial role in mediating ruptures in the relationship between Nalini and Maya which are mainly a result of Maya's feelings of ambivalence towards her mother. Ammu, the grandmother, Ammu the young sister, and Maggie the "othermother" all help soften the tension between Nalini and Maya. As explained in the thesis introduction and in chapter one, maternal ambivalence is one of the ways which are used by writers to complicate the representation of the figure of the mother and motherhood. As it is the case in many texts, especially those produced by migrant writers, where the mother/daughter relationship is a central theme, the relationship is initially characterised by mixed feelings of conflict, tension, and love. In such texts, on one hand, the mother's love for the daughter is not effortless; the mother struggles to love and/or to communicate with her daughter. On the other hand, the daughter generally desires autonomy and separation from her mother. In the novel under scrutiny, this ambivalence is felt only by Maya. For Nalini, her love for Maya is effortless. After giving birth to Maya, Nalini says: "I never thought it was possible to feel such love for my baby. You think that you won't expand to love another so, that there is no more room, but it does and it does so effortlessly" (78). What disturbs the bond between Nalini and Maya, from Nalini's perspective, are the boundaries which Maya draws between herself and her mother which are intensified after migration as will be revealed later in the discussion. However, what is important to note here is the fact that since the text presents both protagonists' perspectives,

readers have access to Nalini's feelings about her daughter's sense of ambivalence towards her mother. This idea of accessing the mother's feelings about the fraught relationship that she has with her daughter is reminiscent of the idea that I discussed in chapter one, and which I will address in the next chapter, regarding writers' complication of the ambivalent bond between the mother and her children. Instead of being simply attributed to the mother's internalisation of patriarchal "ideals", the conflicting relationship between the mother and her children is further nuanced and complicated.

5.1 Mother/daughter Conflict and Reconciliation

From the beginning of the story, it becomes clear to readers that Maya's feelings towards her mother are ambivalent. On the first page of the novel, Maya describes her relationship with Nalini as "[t]he battle that ensued between Amma and I continued. She pushed with all her life and I held on. And so it went on for hours and hours, years and years" (1). This scene is about Nalini's delivery of Maya. Maya here describes it as a battle that will last for years. This is not the only instance where Maya refers to her relationship with Nalini as a battle. In another scene featuring Maya with her brother, she takes her father Raul as her ally against her brother and her mother. She describes an incident where she causes Satchin to fall from his bed "[b]oth of us looked at each other, with our respective parent on side, and drew the battle-lines" (20). The other occasion that shows Maya's consideration of her mother as a rival is where she talks about the conflict of food. Maya says that "[f]ood was the battleground between her and us, used to establish the balance of power, Satchin and I stood firm. *She was a skilful opponent*, packing the iddlies into our lunch boxes or putting tomato ketchup on the side so we would be enticed" (emphasis added 238-239). This last passage where Maya describes the conflict over food occurs when she is an adult, unlike the first two

examples which are from Maya and Satchin's childhood. This last passage is narrated by Maya towards the end of the narrative when she is in the process of reconciling with her mother. Thus, the conflict between Nalini and Maya lasts for a very long time. In various instances, Maya consciously tries to challenge her mother. She intentionally irritates her, hoping that Nalini reacts aggressively and this, according to Maya, would create the distance that she wants to build between them. Thinking to herself, Maya states: "I was desperate for her to shout at me, to react, to tell me that she didn't love me, that she couldn't cope with it all and that she was going too but she never did" (51). Remarkably, in every instance of tension that Maya tends to initiate, she is not content with her actions: "[she] wish[s] [she] had never done these things" (51). This indicates that despite willingly aiming to frustrate her mother, Maya still loves her.

As soon as she is born, Maya is given to her mother and here we see the difference between Nalini's perception of Maya as opposed to Maya's attitude toward her mother. While Nalini finds Maya to be "beautiful, just beautiful" (2). Maya says, "I didn't glance up to see my mother's face and instead I turned my head to look at my Achan [father]" (2). Then Maya adds: "attentive people were never far away, my Achan being at the very front of all of them. If he was on one of his trips then it was Ammamma [grandmother] who I needed" (8). Both passages among others in the beginning of the novel demonstrate that at a very early age, Maya starts distancing herself from her mother and gets attached to her father. The father becomes the first source of love. However, this attitude of creating distance is juxtaposed with a desire to be recognised by Nalini. This ambivalence is evident as Maya is shown to purposefully ignore her, yet at the same time, she turns to Nalini seeking safety. Furthermore, when she feels unsafe because of Satchin's rejection of her as a sister, she directly glances at her mother. Maya explains: "it was then I looked at my Amma's face, seeking reassurance. It was so radically happy and anything she told you, you want to believe, for this is the kind of

face she had, calm and peaceful" (3). In this passage, the writer suggests that Maya seeks reassurance that she has her mother by her side. Maya, thus, considers her mother as a source of safety. On another occasion, Maya shows that she has always wanted to be close to Nalini and to love her. She says "I think, deep down, I always wanted to be like Satchin . . . I also envied the closeness [he] had with Amma and Ravi [her step father], somehow I couldn't get there, not like Satchin could" (202). Saying that she could not get where her brother is in his relationship with Nalini indicates that Maya actually has a strong desire of being close to Nalini, yet, she fails. Maya's ambivalence is also clear in that she feels proud when she is around her mother, yet she never reveals her feelings to her. Maya really values her mother's company on the way to school, she says: "[s]he took us to school and I made sure everyone knew she was my Amma . . . Just her being with us made the walk to school so nice" (155-6).

Before the family's migration to England, Maya's ambivalence could be summarised in her consideration of Nalini as her rival and in her desire for separation as well as recognition from her mother. Their relationship becomes more problematic as a result of the family's migration. The gap between Maya and Nalini widens especially as a result of the physical distance from Ammamma. When they are in India, Ammamma is the mediator between Nalini and Maya. For instance, when she refuses to eat what Nalini feeds her, Maya says: "Ammamma ha[s] to take over" (9). Distance from Ammamma results in an interruption in the matrilineal bond. In England, Maya's distance from her mother and her grandmother is motivated by her desire to detach from India. This relationship between Maya's level of attachment to the matrilineal line and her relationship with India gives the matrilineal relationship an enormous cultural significance. This suggests that the level of strength and communication between the members of the matrilineal relationship reflects their relationship and the level of their attachment to the country of origin or heritage. In her cultural dilemma of being torn between two cultures, Maya considers her mother and

grandmother as her main links with the country of origin and its culture. This is apparent in Maya’s decision to block her memories of India by distancing herself from Nalini in hope of becoming English. The interruption of the matrilineal bond symbolises the effect of migration on the mother-child relationship. Regarding Maya’s decision to detach from her mother as a result of her dilemma as a migrant child, she says, “[o]n the days Amma was around, I found it hard, as I also didn’t want to be reminded of India, the good times or our culture . . . I felt we were forced to make a choice and I chose the easiest route, which was to forget the place and the culture that I was from” (50-51). This implies that Maya believes that forgetting her origins will help her assimilate into the English culture. Maya wants to distance herself not because the tradition that her mother carries is oppressive, a recurrent theme in migrant literary texts as I demonstrated in chapter one, but because it reminds her of a good life she had in the past and that she wants to reject now in order to feel and be considered part of the new culture and society. This complex relationship between mother, grandmother, and daughter which alternates between longing and a desire to separate unsettles the dominant trend in migrant texts where the mother appears as a figure from which the daughter must separate.

As a result of the importance of Ammamma in Maya’s relationship with Nalini and her relationship with India, being away from her means an interruption in Maya’s ties with both her mother and India. Before they leave for England, Ammu takes Maya to the beach and reminds her that she should not forget her Indian heritage. Ammu says to Maya “Mol, promise me you’ll try to remember this, all of this, the place you are from when you are older, the sellers, colours, the people, will you, Mol? Don’t ever forget where you’re from” (16). Remembering Ammamma is very central to Maya’s experience of migration. Before she travels, Maya promises herself to remember her grandmother every day: “I would remember her every day for that year” (16). Maya commits to her promise on her first day of

arrival. Her remembrance of Ammamma obstructs her from enjoying being in London the way her brother does, "[it] was day one of remembering my Ammamma. Although it was just the first day, I felt sad" (18). However, after a year of their stay in England, Maya starts growing to be more and more indifferent towards her Indian culture. She explains: "I stopped counting the days and remembering the things that Ammamma told me, because I grew to really like England . . . It wasn't that I forgot India or my Ammamma but India became less and less important" (26). What can be inferred from these quotes is that Maya, again, relates her relationship with India to her memories of her other maternal figure, her grandmother. Regarding identity formation and memory, Anne-Marie Fortier explains the connection between memories and identity construction in migratory settings. According to her "memory becomes the primary ground of identity formation in the context of migration" (157). On one hand, Maya decides to erase her grandmother's memories in order to acquire the British identity that she desires and, on the other, Nalini relies on memories of her mother to keep her children connected to India and to their Indian culture and identity.

For Nalini, Ammu is an anchor in both her experiences of motherhood and migration. The fact that Nalini tells her children stories about their grandmother, and that she writes letters pretending that they are sent by Ammu (93) suggests that, like Maya, Nalini believes that one way of preserving her children's Indianness is through strengthening their relationship with their grandmother. It also indicates the importance of Ammu in Nalini's experience of motherhood. Even when she is away, Ammu is a source of guidance to Nalini in raising her children. As for Nalini's experience of migration, memories of Ammu are represented as her great solace when she feels alienated. Nalini states that memories of her mother and cooking help her overcome her pain: "[f]rom morning to night, I would concoct dishes, remembering recipes and stories from my mother, cook and forget the place I was in" (82). This quote again highlights the centrality and the importance of the maternal figure in

the lives of the novel's character. Even for Nalini, who is herself a mother, the mother figure remains a source of strength and support. Ammu is a source of reconciliation between Nalini and her daughter, and is the backbone of Nalini's success even in her business since it is Ammu who taught Nalini to cook and to love cooking.

Maggie is another maternal figure in the story who plays an important role in the lives of Nalini and Maya, and in bridging the gap between them. The above discussion about the conflict between Nalini and Maya shows that Maya's refusal of Indian food is the main way Maya uses to show her distance from her mother. One way in which Maya manifests her refusal of the Indian culture is through distance from the kitchen. One of the scenes that illustrates Maya's hatred of the kitchen is when she is given a shower by her mother and her grandmother in the kitchen. Maya explains that she hated the kitchen as a child, saying: "I learnt to hate the sight of the kitchen and when the I was old enough to crawl, I would do my very best to scramble out of the situation" (9). This contempt for the kitchen continues to exist even when Maya travels to Spain. Maya admits that her distance and rejection of her mother is manifested in her attitude towards cooking: "[m]any things were sent to come between us and the result, my feelings of absolute rejection, was symbolised by what I was cooking now: a few basic packet ingredients thrown together chaotically which tasted bitter and smelt burnt" (187). The ingredients are "thrown" "chaotically" by Maya, an indication that her cooking is a rebellion against her mother's approach which is, as demonstrated throughout the chapter, a sacred activity practised with love and care. Before she joins a university in Scotland, Maya only goes into the kitchen when Maggie is present (119). This closeness between Maya and Maggie indicates the role that Maggie plays in Maya's life. Thus, Maggie fulfils the role of the "othermother" who supports the daughter as well as the biological mother when the relationship between them becomes fraught. Nalini expresses her struggle to communicate with Maya stating that, "it was impossible to get through to her,

there were no ways to communicate". This gap between Nalini and Maya is mediated by Maggie. On various occasions, Maggie helps Nalini when communication with Maya appears to be impossible (181). She also raises Maya's consciousness about the sacrifices that her mother is making for her and her brother: "[l]isten, young lady . . . Think of your mother. She'll be working hard all day so she can put some dinner on the table for you, so the least you can do is be grateful; at least she's there for you" (39).

The above shows that the distance that exists between Nalini and Maya, which is intensified by migration, is mediated by a member of the matrilineal bond. The role of the mediator that the maternal figure performs extends to include Ammu, Nalini's youngest daughter who also participates in mediating the gap between Nalini and Maya. The birth of Ammu is portrayed as a significant event that revives the relationship between Maya and Nalini:

> [w]hen Ammu was old enough to crawl, she went around the house looking for Maya . . . Both my daughters loved each other and this put my heart at ease. Maya had changed so much since Ammu's birth, not just with me but with everyone; I could talk to her, laugh with her, she was open and not guarded. The baby brought the two of us together (138).

Despite her very young age, Ammu could soften the tension between Nalini and Maya and repair the fractured bond. The character of Ammu, named after her grandmother, has a highly metaphorical significance in the novel and plays a significant role in the maintenance of the bond. Her birth symbolises the continuity of the matrilineal line. In the scene of Ammu's birth, Nalini feels that her mother is present in the room. She says: "[w]e named her after my mother, Ammu, and as I slept that night with her beside me, I smelt the scent of sesame oil

and ginger lingering above us and I knew she was there" (134). The closeness between Nalini and Ammu evokes the smell of Ammu, Nalini's mother. This is the first sign of a new strong relationship between Ammu, the mother, and her archetype. Ammu can be seen as an incarnation of the old Ammu. Sharing the same name, though, is not the only thread that connects Ammu to her grandmother. Despite being born in England, the young Ammu has a very strong relationship with Indian cuisine and the kitchen. Ammu inherited love for the kitchen and cooking from Nalini emphasises her attachment to her female relatives, and hence to the Indian culture. Ammu's curiosity about cooking and spices is illustrated in this exchange between Nalini and Ammu: "'[w]hy does cinnamon take away bitterness, Amma? Will the combination take sadness away?' 'Why do you have to serve it in that order?' The same questions I asked my own mother'" (270). Ammu's geographically-distant bond with her grandmother appears in one of the qualities that she is known for: being "constant" unlike her siblings (270)[28]. The quality of being constant is attributed to the old Ammu as she has been present throughout the narrative in Nalini's life whenever Nalini needed her; physically in India, and emotionally when Nalini moved to England. The embodiment of the grandmother in the young daughter Ammu and the fact that she possesses many qualities of her grandmother suggests that the matrilineal bond is eternal and will survive even after the death of one of its members. Also, for Maggie, despite being from a different country of origin and culture, she plays a very essential role in Nalini's mothering, in mediating the tension between Maya and Nalini, and in the subjectivity of both of them. In other words, matrilineage and other forms of female bonding like "other mothering" are quintessential for both the migrant mother and her daughter. The novel's representation of different kinds and

[28] In this quote, "unlike her siblings" refers to the fact that Satchin passes away and Maya leaves her mother to attend university in Scotland and later to study in Spain.

ways of bonding expands the meaning of matrilineage and female solidarity to include transnational and transcultural bonding.

5.2 Transnational/Transcultural Matrilineage

Literary discussions about the heritage that mothers pass on to their daughters and then daughters transmit to their daughters is generally a discussion about cultural norms and traditions that elder women in the lineage believe are crucial for the next female generations' identity development. In her analysis of twentieth-century literary autobiographical works, Lynn Z. Bloom summarises the elements of the heritage that female characters tend to transmit to their female descendants. Her work discusses the idea of female heritage transmission in female autobiographies, yet the notion of female heritage can be extended to cover novels that depict matrilineage as a significant theme. The novels that I believe are relatable to the idea of female heritage as explained by Bloom are those that delineate the experience of female daughters of migrant parents. These characters generally possess conflicting selves, and their stories portray a journey of self-discovery. In these stories mothers and other female characters who form the matrilineal narrative, play a paramount role in the daughters' construction of strong identities through their endeavours of cultural transmission and/or support. Bloom asserts that "a heritage is a gift from the past and a hope for the continuity of the future; as such; mother-daughter relationships are vital, important linkings of generations, as varied as the women who comprise them" (291). She further explains that not only do mothers help their daughters achieve a sense of self but they also teach them "human values" (294). Despite the fact that her ideas on heritage and mother-daughter relationships were published in 1980, they are relatable to the way these ideas are dealt with in contemporary literature today. Other works published in Britain by female

ethnic minority writers that portray maternal heritage in ways comparable to that in *One Hundred* are Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) and Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999). These two texts are addressed here to show that despite the fact that there is a dominant trend that depicts the migrant family in very negative light, there are counter narratives that portray complex familial dynamics and present the family, more specifically female ancestors, as a backbone in the female character's achievement of a strong sense of subjectivity. Examining the other counter narrative's engagement with ethnic traditions, primarily culinary habits and eating etiquette, unsettle the equation of tradition with women's subordination and rather reveal it as a source of female agency.

The commonality between these two texts and *One Hundred* is that in the three texts, the daughter grows up in Britain, aspires to assimilate into British culture, and feels inferior to her white friends. The three daughter characters Meena, Faith, and Maya completely detach themselves from their ethnic cultural heritage, Indian for Maya and Meena and in the case of Faith Caribbean, and adopt English culture. The turning point in their lives is the encounter with a female ancestor, the grandmother for Meena and Maya, and a maternal aunt for Faith. The female ancestor, therefore, in the three narratives is presented as a mediator between the daughters' ancestors' heritage and their present. Family stories and heritage are told by the grandmother herself in Syal's story, by Faith's aunt in Levy's narrative, and via a letter left by the deceased grandmother in Nair's novel. In Levy's and Nair's stories the daughters embark on a physical journey "back home". Faith's journey to Jamaica and Maya's to India become reasons for their self-awareness, and acceptances and pride in their cultural heritage. On their way back, both characters are shown to be carrying luggage. Faith is loaded with Jamaican items that her aunt thought she must take with her to England. Maya

brings Indian fabric that she buys for her business along with two precious letters from her grandmother.

These items are metaphors for the ancestral knowledge that the characters bring with them from their countries of origin/heritage. The encounter with the female ancestors allows these characters who were once uncertain of their belonging to identify with their heritage and to acquire a hybrid identity where their conflicting selves finally culminate. For Syal's Meena, "home" comes to her, it is the grandmother who arrives in England and unveils the heritage that Meena's ancestors have. This suggests that in these works of literature, the female ancestor is portrayed as a symbol of origin. She is the carrier of the family heritage and more specifically of the female ancestor's heritage. Female ancestors carry a heritage that the younger characters, when eventually encountering it, become rooted, and which helps them construct new strong and hybrid identities.

The turning point in the daughter's reconciliation with their ancestors' heritage in Syal's and Nair's is illustrated through their attitude towards food which is a contested cultural element. Both writers show that Maya and Meena start to gain pride in their cultures and ancestors' legacies through appreciating their Indian food and some eating habits that used to be sources of shame for them. In one of the most significant scenes in Syal's story, Anita, who is Meena's white friend, and who before Meena's grandmother's arrival used to be Meena's idol, is invited for dinner at Meena's house. In this scene, Anita asks many questions about the food that is being served. Her questions make Meena's parents feel uncomfortable, especially her mother who according to Meena is "losing confidence" (253). The most surprising view for Anita is when she sees that Meena's parents are eating with their fingers. Here, Meena's answer is very unexpected to her parents and even to Meena herself. Meena who has always tried to mask her Indian cultural customs and traditions is now defending this eating habit: "I had never eaten Indian food in the presence of a white

person before . . . I would not have Anita play the same games with my parents that had made me dizzy and confused". Meena then explains to her friend how eating with fingers is regarded as an elite eating habit practised in "all top restaurants" (254). She decides it is time to reclaim her identity and her subjectivity through embracing her Indian culture: "I would no longer be Anita's shadow but her equal" (237). This confidence and embrace of her ethnic origins come after Meena's connection with her grandmother. The grandmother tells her stories about the past, speaks to her in Punjabi, and acts very confidently in front of everyone in the village. The grandmother's strong personality and the stories that she tells Meena every day, have had a transformative effect on Meena's self-confidence and relationship with her mother and her Indian heritage.

Eating with fingers is a traditional eating habit in many Eastern cultures, including among them the Indian culture. Eating with fingers is considered a major symbol of culinary and cultural difference in real life as in literary representation. In *Making Sense of British Muslim Novels*, Chambers states that "[w]estern and imperial discourse represses the sense of touch in this area, condemning the etiquette of eating with the fingers as uncivilized" (52-53). For this reason, in both *One Hundred* and *Anita and Me*, eating with hands is initially considered a source of embarrassment both to Maya and to Meena. In *One Hundred* scenes that portray eating habits are recurrent; they are depicted deeply and are one of the metaphors used by the author to represent cultural conflicts. Interestingly, Maya's decision to order Indian food at the hotel restaurant in India comes as soon as she decides to travel south to Kerala to see her grandmother. This remarkable change in her attitude towards Indian food that she did not eat for many years is marked by a sense of appreciation of eating habits that Maya used to despise. At the hotel where she stays in Kerala, Maya usually orders omelette, salad, and French fries (238). Yet, the emotional sense of connectedness that Maya feels after

visiting the sea and plunging into it like her grandmother used to do, opens her appetite for iddlies: a typical Indian dish that her grandmother used to prepare (238).

In the same scene, Maya recalls an incident that happens to her with her Spanish ex-fiancé in Spain. She recalls how angry he becomes when he sees her picking a piece of chicken with her fingers, he objects, "'Maya, what do you think you are doing? What do you think the cocktail sticks are for?'" (239). In *One Hundred* and as well as in Syal's narrative, characters who seek belonging to the mainstream British or European culture, tend to hide these Indian eating habits. These habits, such as not using cutlery, are kept as private practices adopted by other family members who are still tied to their Indian heritage. Characters who desire acknowledgement from their white friends, however, believe that revealing such habits would inhibit their acceptance and assimilation within British society. Being part of English society for the children of migrant parents is problematic because of their conceptualisation of Englishness/Britishness. It is clear from Nalini's children's rejection of the Indian culture, that being English for them entails being White. This understanding of Britishness in Nair's narrative is manifested even in the attitudes of Nalini's children peers when they are in school. One day at her school, Maya engages in an argument with one of her peers, Mark Fitzgerald. In their argument, food appears as one of the major markers of their clash. Mark begins by calling Maya "Paki" (37). Not knowing what "Paki" means, Maya tells him that she is not "Paki". Mockingly, Mark says "[w]ell, why have you got dirty hair and that Paki smell? Bet you eat with your fingers an'all . . . Bet you've brought some smelly sandwiches with you as well" (37). Again, eating with the fingers appears as a source of cultural conflict, a marker of difference, and a source of shame.

However, Maya's attitude towards these eating habits changes as a result of her reconnection with the matrilineal line. Maya no longer believes it is unhygienic to eat with

fingers, now she herself eats with her fingers and she appreciates the feeling of connection to food that eating with fingers offers just as her mother used to explain to her, Maya says, "I cut softly into them with my knife and fork and rolled my eyes thinking of Amma's comments: fingers connected you to food in a way no other instrument could" she then picks up the food with her fingers (239). It is noticeable in the previous passages that Nair engages with the tradition of eating with fingers from different perspectives. She presents it as a source of shame, as well as a symbol of celebration of one's culture. Eating with the fingers is, thus, presented as both a sign of conflict and reconciliation. The role that the grandmother plays in Maya's identity construction, self-confidence, and celebration of her ethnicity highlights the importance of transnational matrilineal relationships between migrant children and their female ancestors who reside in faraway lands.

The other baggage item that Maya brings back from India is letter that Ammu leaves for Maya before she passes away which contains words that Maya needs to hear in order to come to terms with her hybridity and to regain the trust that disappeared from her relationship with her mother. Her grandmother writes:

> *Your journey, you know, begins here in the place where you are from . . . find the pace: listen to the magical conversation that is always taking place through the food that you savour, the music that you hear, the people that you meet, and you will never feel alone . . . Know that I will love you no matter where you are or what you do and that I am always, always with you, even on the days of doubting, where you think that it is all just an illusion* (italics in original 249).

Maya does not acquire the flexible hybrid identity until she reconciles with her mother, her ancestry, and India. When the interruption between Maya, her mother, and her grandmother

is bridged, the line of communication is rebuilt and is made stronger. This strong bond that is reconstructed after being interrupted by migration helps Maya reconcile her conflicting selves.

The novel ends with the three members of the matrilineal line having a strong relationship. The last scene in the novel is Maya's marriage (293-4). The last pages of the story show that the legacies of the maternal figures, such as cooking and the strong matrilineal bond, are appreciated and they play active roles in the characters' subjectivity and self-fulfilment. The role that maternal figures' legacies play in characters' subjectivity and self-fulfilment is seen in Nalini's pickle continuing to grow and Maya starting her own business of sewing, whose foundation was set by Maggie during Maya's childhood. Maya opens a boutique in Bond Street in London with money that Maggie leaves for Maya before she dies, "[Maya] order[s] the most beautiful fabrics from India" (291). This quote symbolises the success of the efforts of the maternal. Maggie is Maya's source of inspiration and creativity. When Maya was young, Maggie taught Maya how to sew. Maya narrates that: "she helped me make clothes, showing me how to cut patterns. Maggie had bought an endless supply of fabrics . . . Soft material that went on and on that I could tear into angry pieces or snip with calm precision. All could be stitched together, making whatever creation we wanted to" (171). Also, the fact that she orders materials from India entails that Nalini's effort in preserving her children's Indianess have succeeded as well. Starting a business which is taught by her "othermother", in a luxury street such as Bond Street, and choosing fabric from her country of origin, which she reconciled with as a result of the efforts of her mother and grandmother, all indicate the role that the maternal figure plays in Maya's subjectivity and self-fulfilment.

Along with the maternal figures and matrilineal heritage being a source of female characters' subjectivity and self-fulfilment, the kitchen continues to be a place of female

bonding and intersubjectivity as it was since the start of the narrative. In the letter that Ammamma leaves for Nalini, she asks her to teach Maya what she considers the most important thing: “forgiveness” (285). The fact that Ammu wants Nalini to teach Maya forgiveness shows Ammu’s care about her descendants. It also demonstrates Ammu’s determination to transfer the heritage which she believes helps future generations in their lives. Nalini states that the forgiveness that Ammu taught her is “the kind of forgiveness which belongs to a courageous heart [that] does not become embroiled in and constrained in anger and bitterness, but moves forward and grows” (102). Learning to forgive helps Maya in achieving subjectivity and it also promotes intersubjectivity through connecting Ammu and her descendants and empowering each one of them. Nalini decides to transfer this knowledge about forgiveness which she has acquired from Ammu to Maya in the kitchen–through spices. Maya says that “[s]he had given Ana and Anita the week off and had the closed sign up so the two of us could spend time in the kitchen. ‘It’s forgiveness, Mol. I know there is no more resentment inside you but forgiveness also includes oneself’” (286). Nalini herself is taught forgiveness and other virtues through spices. The next passage shows a memory of Ammu’s use of spices to calm down conflicts between dwellers of her village, Nalini recalls, “[i]f in the village there was a rift that seemed impossible to heal, she would muster forgiveness with bright turmeric, mustard seeds, ginger, garlic, the bitterness of lemon anger of hot chilli. The latter two ingredients were supposed to counter the bad feelings and diffuse them” (102). Combined together, these two passages along with the scene of Maya’s business launch illustrate the importance of both matrilineage and cooking in nurturing female intersubjectivity. Both Nalini’s and Maya’s successful businesses are inspired by maternal figures. Moreover, both businesses are a combination between modernity and tradition, and between cultural elements of both India and Britain. The combination of the past and the

present, between both cultures is thus presented in the novel as a prerequisite for the development of strong self-fulfilled female characters.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Preethi Nair's novel *One Hundred Shades of White* is a text that resists stereotypical representation of Indian women. The innovation in the novel's resistance of patriarchy and Orientalist views of Indian women and mothers can be found in its combination of different literary strategies. To achieve the end of challenging the rhetoric of the victimised and oppressed Indian woman and mother, the writer presents a text that centres around women and their journey towards self-realisation and agency. To create strong female characters whose journeys towards power and self-fulfilment are inspired by their relationship with their matrilineal heritage, the writer adopts the stylistic strategy of a dual narrative voice, combining the mother's and daughter's points of view. The text also relies on thematic strategies in its endeavour to present strong female characters. One of the themes is the representation of complex and diverse matrilineage bonds which expands the definition of the maternal role and matrilineal relationships. It also resists reductionist representation of the Indian woman by problematising the notion of self-sacrifice. The novel does this through portraying maternal "devotion" as a reason for the mother's self-fulfilment and self-realisation. This is seen in Ammu, Nalini's mother, success as the village cook after she left her original village for her daughter's future. It is also seen in Nalini's success on the personal level; she embarks on the job that is the reason she meets her husband Ravi because "[her] only concern was for [her] children, to protect, provide for them and to make sure they evolved into good people" (86). The job is not only a source of success on the personal level, but also on the financial side of Nalini's life. Because Nalini worked very hard for the sake of

her children, she ended up establishing a very successful business that she loves and became financially independent. In addition to self-sacrifice, another notion that the novel destabilises is female cultural heritage and domesticity. Cooking being known as a female domestic skill is centralised in the novel and presented in ways that disrupt the division of public/domestic sphere. Cooking, food, and eating are presented as cultural markers, and as symbols of parent/child conflicts and reconciliation which challenge their simplistic perceptions and by extension the simplistic perception of other "domestic" every-day activities which are usually seen as unproductive or even contributors to female oppression.

The role of matrilineal relationships and heritage proves to be crucial in the construction of female migrant identities in the novel. As a migrant mother, Nalini's connection with her mother through the food that she cooks and through memories of their past help her in the cultivation of a strong hybrid identity and in her journey as a mother of migrant children. Matrilineal heritage, one that is transnational and transcultural in nature, is portrayed as a backbone in Maya's identity and self-realisation as well. Maya's encounter with her grandmother's legacy and with her Indian culture offer her the self-confidence that she is missing in order to be able to accept her Indian heritage and to acquire a strong hybrid identity. The novel's representation of the maternal and female solidarity is interesting. It does not only portray the need of the daughter, a second-generation migrant, for ancestral heritage, as is the case for *Anita and Me* and *Fruit of the Lemon*, but also outlines the importance of this heritage for the mother. Because the narrative in *One Hundred* is told from both the mother's and the daughter's points of view, it gives readers access to the mother

figure's need of other maternal figures and of her youngest daughter in her mothering and in her experience as a female migrant.

As said above, the ending of the novel symbolises the success of the effort of the maternal in fostering strong hybrid identities. Nalini and Maya have a very successful business whose origins are related to maternal ancestors and assistance. At the same time, all the female characters at the end of the narrative, Nalini, Maya, and Ammu, have strong ties to India, its culture, and the female heritage. The link between these aspects of the character's lives symbolises the role that matrilineal bonds play in the characters' relationship with the country and the culture of origin and in the characters' ability to achieve the migrant identity that they are satisfied with. It also symbolises the idea that having a strong relationship with the culture and traditions does not always impedes one's success. The strong hybrid identities that both Nalini and her daughter achieve occur through the efforts a complex matrilineal line and its heritage.

The next chapter continues with the idea of reclaiming the complex meaning of domestic spaces through blurring the rigid boundaries between public/private spheres, and through re-attributing value to places and acts that might otherwise be deemed mundane. The next chapter deals with *A Golden Age*'s problematisation of women's embrace of the domestic, and it addresses Anam's engagement with the representation of the figure of the migrant mother in nationalist literature.

Chapter Three: Problematising the Figure of the Mother As/in Nation in Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age*

Introduction

Along the lines of the previous chapters, this chapter is concerned with the study of the representation of a mother's experience of motherhood and her journey of migration in Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007). *A Golden Age* is centred on the life of Rehana, a widowed migrant mother of two children, Sohail and Maya. Corresponding to the analysis in the previous chapters, the current one highlights the novel's engagement with, and response to stereotypes of victimisation and oppression that are often associated with "Third World" women and women and mothers of colour[29]. This is realised through examining Rehana's negotiation of norms of motherhood and womanhood and her cultivation of agency and subjectivity. The stereotypes that denigrate "Third World" women are propagated by discourses of media, politics, and even by some feminists. Studying the role of some contemporary feminists' role in disseminating reductionist views on women from the "Third World", Caren Kaplan asserts that "new global feminist orientalism in a postmodern moment echoes the concerns of mid-late nineteenth century European and U.S feminists". She adds that these feminists have shifted their attention to places of "'tradition' and 'barbarism'", or what she refers to as "the margins–the 'orient'" which still grapple with "patriarchy and other forms of oppression" issues that are considered "largely overcome" in the West (222). As I have highlighted in the introduction of this thesis, "Third World" women's oppression is generally associated with what seems to be inherently patriarchal traditions and cultures. For

[29] See the thesis introduction for a discussion of the propagation of stereotypes about "Third World" women.

this reason, the chapter will focus on the study of Rehana's agency and subjectivity in relation to social and nationalist tropes and ideals of motherhood and domesticity.

Like the other mother characters–Sammar and Nalini–Rehana's agency and subjectivity are not cultivated *solely* through resisting norms and traditions. She rather engages with societal and nationalist norms in different ways, and by doing so, she problematises the very meaning of agency. The vilifying images that have been associated with women from the "Third World" subsequently imply that these women need to overthrow what appears like essentially patriarchal traditions and norms in order to rid themselves of their subordination and object positions. Rehana's negotiation of norms recalls Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood's theories of agency and subjectivity. Addressing the novel's engagement with norms of womanhood and motherhood, I refer to Judith Butler's and Saba Mahmood's theorisations of subjectivity and agency. Both scholars' insights about subjectivity and agency are especially telling for their problematisation of notions of power and the subject's relation to it.

In the previously analysed novels, Sammar and Nalini seem to embody what Janice Boddy calls "the instruments of their own oppression" (qtd. in Mahmood 8), if they are read through the lens of what Mahmood calls "progressive politics" (Mahmood 34). Such a reading "incarcerate[s] the notion of agency within the trope of resistance against oppressive and dominating operations of power" (34)[30]. Similarly, Rehana's relationship with societal

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[30] Sammar's adherence to the teachings of Islam, for instance refusing to be in a relationship with Rae outside of marriage and the wearing of the veil, could be read as signs of regression (Hassan 198). Wail Hassan adds that Aboulela's female characters reflect "a total denial of freedom and agency" (197). This reading of Aboulela's characters including Sammar is emblematic of Mahmood's assertion that agency came to be perceived as "consubstantial with resistance to relations of domination" (10). This explains Mahmood's goal of "detaching the concept of agency from the trope of resistance" (188). Sammar's embodiment of what looks like the source of her oppression is also found in *One Hundred* as is demonstrated throughout chapter two. Nalini's devotion to

and nationalist ideals and norms, and equally important, her negotiation of a nationalist identity might be read as an adherence to patriarchy and as signs of oppression and passivity. This chapter will reveal Anam's problematisation of stereotypical constructions of "Third World" women through presenting a model of agency that does not conform to liberal notions of subjectivity.

A Golden Age has been studied as a novel that vocalises the experience of women in a liberation struggle which has been subsumed by certain male narratives of nationalism and by official accounts of the nation. Sabine Lauret-Taft in "You're Just a Housewife. What on Earth Could You Possibly Do?": The History of the Bangladesh War of Independence Told by Women in Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age*" examines the way in which Anam narrates a war story through weaving the events of violence and struggle into the everyday lives of women. Lauret-Taft's study of *A Golden Age* emphasises the power of women's voices and narratives in restoring the forgotten stories of women in the War of Liberation 1971. Ruvani Ranasinha in *Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women's Fiction: Gender, Narration and Globalisation* similarly explores the role that the representation of women's everyday lives, family dynamics, and the domestic play in challenging certain male imaginations of the war where women are mere symbols of the nation and where the domestic is perceived as an apolitical space. While both critics consider *A Golden Age* a novel that challenges male masculinist construction of the mother as a metaphor in narratives of nationalism through presenting the war from a mother's point of view and through celebrating the everyday that is often regarded as mundane, Cara Cilano in *National Identities in Pakistan: The 1971 War in*

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her children, her adoption of the domestic (specifically the kitchen), and her celebration of cooking as a female skill can also be read as signs of regression to traditional gender role which implied lack of agency.

Contemporary Pakistani Fiction rather contends that the novel's "sacriliza[tion] of the domestic sphere through violence" reproduces "a patriarchal nationalism" (122).

My study of *A Golden Age* in this chapter is in line with the readings that consider the novel a story of empowerment and of reclaiming the lost voice of women and mothers in narratives of war and nationalism. My reading of the text, however, sheds light on another angle that has not been thoroughly scrutinised. Analysing the character of Rehana, I focus not only on the study of Rehana as a metaphor of the nation, which is a dominant trope in male writing of nationalism (Elleke Bohmer, Ketu Katrak, Neluka Silvia), and to which I will come back shortly. But I also focus on her portrayal as a "real" migrant mother[31]. I argue that the novel depicts the daily life of a migrant mother emphasising her struggles of cultivating a sense of belonging, negotiating two languages, and managing a relationship with children who have a strong allegiance to a place in which the mother is not sure she belongs. Approaching Rehana as a migrant mother and as a subject who the events of the story are seen from her own perspective reveals that the text counters the clichéd accounts of motherhood and mother-child relationship as they are narrated by migrant daughters. The text specifically disrupts the view of the mother as a carrier of tradition and culture. In *A Golden Age*, the mother herself has a complex, and at times conflicting, relationship with her place of origin and the land to which she migrates. In this chapter, I argue that rather than transmitting culture to her children, she herself has a complex, uncertain, and changing sense of belonging.

By presenting a "real" experience of motherhood, Anam challenges male writing of the nation in which the mother is confined to the symbolic. Boehmer argues that "[t]he

[31] By "real" mother, I do not mean that the figure is anything other than fictional, but rather represents the lived or representative experience of a mother as opposed to the figurative mother.

postcolonial nation founded on the imagery of national sons" (23), the woman in contrast, "assumes an emblematic status as a symbol of maternal sacrifice or the nation's fierce, 'virginal' pride" (28). She adds that a recurrent image of the mother in certain male texts is that of "the redemptive carrier of the nation's cultural traditions" (Boehmer 33). In this chapter I argue that in her response to certain male writers' tradition of keeping the mother solely within the metaphorical realm, Anam does not resort to the rejection of the metaphoric association of the mother with the nation, she rather represents two images of the mother: the mother as nation (metaphor), and the representation of a "real" mother in the nation. This is evident throughout the text where Rehana's relationship with her children is emblematic of the nation, Bangladesh, and is also a representation of the experience of motherhood of a migrant mother in a nationalist struggle. Both images of motherhood, the metaphoric and the "real", are valued, problematised, and nuanced. Anam intertwines the literal and symbolic meanings of the nation in presenting Rehana's body, her life story, and her relationships. This is in Boehmer's terms a "literalisation (or defamiliarisation) of the accepted status of the body as sign, in particular of the national body as woman/mother" (135). Anam's representation of the literal mother figure in the nation and its problematisation recalls what Boehmer describes as: "*literalising* inherited gender-marked tropes–concretising and ironising them–and also *reconfiguring* them in different ways" (emphasis in original 207).

My study of the metaphoric representation of the mother focuses on Rehana's embodiment of gendered tropes of nationalism. I study the novel's adoption of two of the most prevalent tropes of nationalism in relation to women: the trope of the mother as nation and domesticity. I focus on the novel's representation of Rehana as a nation and her espousal of the domestic in a way that problematises both tropes. I also highlight the text's "ironisation", to use Bohemer's words, of aspects of these tropes like Rehana's uncertain nationalism and her sexual encounter with the Major. Rehana's uncertain nationalism

disrupts the image of the mother as preserver of the nation's culture and traditions, and her sexual encounter resists the asexuality of the body of the woman as it is utilised as an allegory for the nation by certain male writers. This allows for a mode of subjectivity and agency that critically engages with male nationalist imagination of the mother and also with some feminists' rejection of all allegorisation of women and their bodies. This reveals how Anam's engagement with both tropes is neither a complete severance nor a full adoption.

1. Background about the author and short summary of the novel

The chapter starts off by outlining some biographical information about the author. This biographical information, in line with the previous chapters, shows how certain personal experiences of the authors, in particular the experience of negotiating a sense of home, find a way into their texts. *A Golden Age* (2007) is Tahmima Anam's debut novel. Like the formerly discussed writers, Aboulela and Nair, The Bangladeshi-British writer Anam also writes as a British migrant. Her text, *A Golden Age*, is also like the previously analysed texts, greatly inspired by her own experiences as a migrant and by other personal life experiences. Like many migrant writers, Anam bears a relationship with her country of origin which is, as she describes it, "complicated" (Anam, "Tahmima Anam: 'I have a complicated relationship"*)*. Anam talks about an early-life struggle to identify a sense of belonging.

Since her birth Anam was raised in different parts of the world. She was born in Dhaka Bangladesh and, owing to the nature of her father's work, she travelled to Paris, New York, and Bangkok. Anam left Bangladesh with her parents at the age of two. She says that although as a family they were living abroad, "all they [her parents] talked about was when they were going to go home" (Anam, "Bangladeshi novelist"). As a young child, she thought

that moving from one country to another "was [her] whole life", while for her parents, "it was just a pause" (Anam, "Tahmima Anam"). This suggests that what "home" meant for Anam is completely different from what her parents considered it to be. She has experienced a complex meaning of home where for her parents, home was one's country of origin, while for her, it meant being affiliated with multiple places. After their return to Bangladesh, Anam's parents were very elated by the long-awaited re-encounter with home. Yet, Anam found it difficult to fit in the country which her parents expected her to embrace. Describing how challenging the experience of returning to Bangladesh was for her, Anam says, "It was terrible. It was so complicated for me. [Bangladesh] was a place I had difficulty fitting into. But I had that added difficulty of feeling like it's a place where I should have felt I belonged. And yet I catastrophically didn't belong there" (Anam, "Bangladeshi novelist"). This complex meaning of home and belonging is a topic that Anam comes back to time and again in her interviews and discussions. In an exchange of emails with the Malaysian writer Tash Aw, Anam acknowledges that the concept of home is highly problematic for her, she explains that she finds it "terribly exotic" when she hears people directly answering "I'm from here" when asked where they are from. She tells Aw about the discomfort that this complex relationship with home causes her: "I used to feel uncomfortable about this, but then I decided to embrace it. Yes, it's exhausting–having to constantly translate, not just words, but layers of experience–but there's also something exhilarating about it. In any case, it's the only reality I know".

Speaking to Claire Armistead, Anam explains her feelings towards Bangladesh: "on the one hand I think it's the source of a lot of my creative energy and when bad things happen I feel deeply, personally involved in it. On the other hand it's very difficult for me to imagine having a life there. I've come to accept it's a long-distance love affair". This awareness and acceptance of difference, and at times celebration of it, is reminiscent of Stuart

Hall's definition of the experience of diaspora. He refuses to define diasporic experience in terms of "essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a concept of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity". (Hall 438). In other words, the migrant identity which Anam comes to accept and embrace is one that is characterised by difference and hybridity. Thus, this migrant sense of self culminates only when one accepts the inevitable complexity of one's identity.

This search for belonging and this uncertain sense of home finds a way into *A Golden Age*. Anam's protagonist Rehana is a migrant whose relationship with her place of origin, Calcutta, and with the country in which she resides, Bangladesh, is very complex and at times distressing as it will be seen later in the discussion. Rehana is a widowed mother of two children, originally from Calcutta. She later moves to Karachi, Pakistan–known as West Pakistan before the War of Liberation in 1971–with her bankrupt father and family. Rehana then marries Iqbal Haque with whom she moves to Dhaka, Bangladesh (known as East Pakistan at the time). These multiple movements make Rehana's sense of belonging dubious with the start of the uprising of the people of East Pakistan and the growing sense of nationalism of her revolutionary children. Rehana develops multiple affiliations which, as the events of the novel unfold, become conflicting. Rehana cherishes her memories in Calcutta, she loves Urdu, her native language which can be considered one thing that links her to her sisters in Karachi. She is also affiliated with Bangladesh, where she cultivates good memories of her late husband, builds her precious house Shona, and meets friends who become family to her. Like Anam, her protagonist Rehana experiences anxiety as her sense of home and belonging become questionable. For Rehana, this feeling of uncertainty starts with the War of Liberation and the pressure enacted on her by her revolutionary children to support the country's cause. Towards the end of the narrative, Rehana achieves a clearer sense of belonging where she calls Bangladesh "home" (236). However, Rehana's long-lived love for

Urdu and Urdu poetry which continues till the end of the story echoes Anam's "long-distance love affair" with Bangladesh.

The other instance of the influence of Anam's own life experiences on *A Golden Age* is the story of her grandmother and her heroism. While as seen in the previous chapter, *One Hundred* is dedicated to Nair's grandmother, and the figure of the grandmother features as a major character in the text, in *A Golden Age*, Anam's grandmother is the novel's major source of inspiration. Rehana, the main character, is inspired by the life story of Anam's grandmother and her experience of surviving the Bangladeshi War of Liberation of 1971 ("The Story Behind").

2. The Mother as Nation: Restoring Women's Narrative of Nationalism

2.1 The symbolic mother

Before embarking on the writing of *A Golden Age*, Anam's aim was to write an "epic political story about the war" centred on the turbulence that swept the country at that time ("The Story Behind"). However, she found herself weaving a personal story of a widowed mother survival of the War of Liberation. Anam asserts that, "[t]hat story [of her grandmother] has always stayed with me, so it became the seed of the novel. I wrote a few short stories about that incident, and the novel grew from there" ("First Look"). Writing a story that is inspired by her grandmother and her experience of the emergence of Bangladesh as a nation, Anam wanted to "tell a particular story that hadn't been told before" (Anam, "Tahmima Anam"). This quote is crucial to the discussion in this chapter on the writing of history, nationalism, and women's writing of war and nation. What "hadn't been told before" refers to the stories of women, mothers and daughters who contributed in a variety of ways to

the liberation of Bangladesh, and whose stories have been suppressed and denied by mainstream history and by certain male narratives of nationalism.

Women in discourses of nationalism, be it theoretical, political, or literary, have been absent and/or allegorised. Regarding major figures of theories of nationalism, Elleke Boehmer asserts that "gender forms *the* formative dimension for the construction of nationhood", she adds that, "leading male theorists of the nation such as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Anthony Smith have either ignored or failed to address, often choosing even so to define the nation, whether overtly or covertly, as normatively a male terrain, a masculine enterprise" (emphasis in original 22-3). For Boehmer, like for many feminist theorists who challenge the male-dominated nature of nationalist discourses, "the new postcolonial nation is historically a male-constructed space, narrated into modern self-consciousness by male leaders, activists and writers, in which women are more often than not cast as symbols or totems, as the bearers of tradition" (Boehmer 22). Similarly, Sangeeta Ray argues that "most modern national imaginings" are "androcentric" (3). Boehmer's criticism of male theorists of nationalism extends to theorists of postcolonial nationalism like Joseph Cleary, Homi Bhabha, and Partha Chatterjee. Boehmer criticises Cleary for overlooking women in his discussion of different minorities' quest to self-determination within nations. Boehmer also criticises Cleary for his partial critique of Benedict Anderson's theorisation of the nation. She argues that Cleary disregards gender as one of the differences–he states "class, ethnic, regional and religious differences"–which Anderson fails to account for in his theory. On the same ground, Boehmer considers Bhabha's idea which juxtaposes "'pedagogies' of the prescriptive national 'master-discourse'" with "the performative interventions of those on its margins" as being "undisturbed by gender". Although Bhabha acknowledges the fact that women's discourse of the nation unsettles its mainstream grand narratives, gender in his theorisation remains "merely another sign of difference" (Boehmer

8). Although Partha Chatterjee, whose theorisation of the domestic in nationalist discourse I will return to when I discuss *A Golden Age*'s representation of the domestic sphere, establishes, Boehmer argues, the "female domestic sphere" as the nations' haven where negotiations between ethnic tradition and European modernity is maintained and managed by male nationalists, his work focuses only on "male proponents of anti-colonial nationalism". Boehmer adds that even Frantz Fanon and Nelson Mandela who "have openly recognised the importance of women to national struggles, and women's self-transformation by way of that contribution . . . do not explore the full implications of their gendered understanding of the nation and of anti-colonial movements" (Boehmer 8). Although both thinkers recognise women's efforts and role in national struggles, it remains lacking when it comes to exploring the intricacies that characterise the relationship between women and nationalism (Boehmer 8). Boehmer's comprehensive discussion of male theorists and thinkers of nationalism, which I briefly discuss above, reveals the marginal position that women occupy in the theoretical study of nationalism.

In masculinist male literature of nationalism, the representation of the woman is limited to the realm of the metaphoric. The delineation of the nation as woman, and of men as their saviours, frequently dominates the portrayal of women in anticolonial and postcolonial literature (Innes 140). In the context of the South Asian subcontinent, Salman Rushdie is among the most famous writers to evoke this metaphor. In his novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), Naseem (Salem's grandmother) is portrayed as a metaphor for the Indian Subcontinent. Naseem is a patient of Dr Aziz and her fractured body becomes a symbol of the 1947 partitioned Indian Subcontinent (Innes 137). From the last half of the nineteenth century until 1947, which marks the Indian quest for independence from the British rule, this metaphor gained recognition within the political and aesthetic discourse, says writer and literary critic Ranjana Ash, "Bharatmata, Mother India, bound in chains waiting for her

children to free her" (Ash 153). By the same token, Innes refers to Sri Aurobindo, an Indian philosopher, poet, and nationalist who symbolically equates the female body with India. Aurobindo refers to India as a conquered mother saying: "I know my country as Mother. I offer her my devotion, my worship. If a monster sits upon her breast and prepares to suck her blood, what does her child do? Does he quietly sit down to his meal… or rush to her rescue?" (qtd. in Innes 137). Other male writers whose works feature the same trope of the symbolic mother of the nation are Caribbean poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite who refers to his country of origin Barbados "as 'mother', the matrix of this connection with the past, the source of meaning and identity" (Boehmer 88). India in Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography* (1936) and *The Discovery of India* (1946) is presented as a nurturing mother (Boehmer 88). The image of the motherland is so prevalent in male writing about nationalism to the point that Somalian writer Nuruddin Farah finds it "absurd" to refer to a nation as fatherland (Boehmer 89).

Likewise, in the context of Bangladeshi male nationalist literature, Neluka Silva asserts that Bangladeshi literature is dominated by the image of the woman who is "imprisoned in the role of [the] passive, grieving mother" (Silva 157). Silva cites several works by male Bangladeshi writers in which the representation of the figure of the mother reflects her argument. Munir Chowdhury's play *Kabar*, written and performed in the 1950s and translated into English and published in 1990, represents the killing of protesting students which takes place in Dhaka as part of East Pakistan liberation movements (Silva 146). What I find relevant in the play for the current discussion is the scene of the graveyard which Silva scrutinises. This scene revolves around a discussion between the ghosts of the killed students and two Pakistani government officials: the Leader and the police officer Hafiz. The students are resurrected from their graves and march to continue their protests (Silva 50). Hafiz play-acts the role of a mother figure of one of the resurrected dead trying to convince him and the

other students to retreat from continuing the struggle and to go back to the graves (Silva 152). His pleads fail because his tone does not reflect that of the nationalist mother who usually motivates her children to protect “the motherland”. He rather disapproves of their struggle and encourages them time and again to “go to sleep” (qtd. in Silva 152). The scene indicates that *Kabar*’s representation of the figure of the mother conforms to the customary male nationalist narratives in which the mother occupies the metaphoric realm. The mother is not a “real” character, and her idealised presence is reflected in Hafiz’s conviction that a maternal figure will persuade the revolutionaries to withdraw from the protests. More examples that Silva mentions are ‘The Bleeding Rose’ by Mohammad Saheb Ali, and ‘Bangladesh, Your Face’ by Daud Haider. Both poems are ladened with images of the motherland or woman as lover where this female figure embodies “the metaphor of woman-as-terrain” (Silva 153). In Ali’s poem, there is an equation of the mother’s face and the nation’s flag. In Haider’s, the motherland is symbolised in a female lover’s body that “the male lover . . . ‘saves every hair’” on it (qtd. in Silva 153). This means that the same image of the symbolic vulnerable lover and/or mother dominates a lot of male writers’ imagination of the nation.

The above literature indicates that the role of women in nationalist struggles is denied and silenced by male theorists of nationalism, mainstream official history, and male writers of national literature since the mother in those constructions is denied a voice and she embodies the realm of imagination and fantasy. This bias in the discussion and representation of nationalism has compelled women writers to counter all these stereotypical and partial narratives. Absence of the “real” mother figure, or woman in general, is challenged by many women writers including Tahmima Anam. Women writers have responded to male representations of the nation and of women in the nation in distinct ways. One of the ways in which women conversed with their male counterparts is through enacting the same tropes used by male writers which are often thought of as source of women’s oppression. The main

tropes that my discussion is concerned with are the trope of the mother as nation and the tropes of the mother who embraces the domestic sphere.

Rehana's embrace of the trope of the mother as nation is prevalent throughout the narrative. I here cite a few quotes from the text that capture the representation of the symbolic mother of the nation and the mother as nation. In one of the scenes, where Sohail and his fellow guerrillas prepare for an operation against West Pakistan's army, he asks his mother if she wants to meet his friends. Sohail says: "[t]hey'll be happy to get your blessings. Some of them haven't seen their own mothers in a long time" (109). The idea that the revolutionaries take the blessing of a mother is very significant, however, the fact that they are willing and happy to take the blessing of a mother who is not their own is even more telling. This might be read as an emblem of the idealisation of the figurative maternal presence by male nationalist characters/heroes which dominates narratives of nationalism by male writers as it was seen in the discussion above. The main aspect to note in this "acceptance" of the trope of the symbolic mother is that Rehana is not a mere metaphor in a male protagonist's imagination of the nation. Rehana is a "real" mother in addition to being a symbolic figure, the events are seen from her perspective, and the reader has access to her own feelings and reflections about the war and all the events of the narrative. The reader has access to Rehana's feelings about the idea of being a symbolic mother to the other guerrillas, the narrator states: "[Rehana] felt a flush of pride at being asked" (109). If this scene is juxtaposed with the scene of the graveyard in Chowdhury's play *Kabar* which I cited earlier, it becomes clear that while the maternal is idealised in both instances, the mother in *Kabar* is absent despite her idealisation to the point that her voice becomes appropriated by the government official. In *A Golden Age*, Rehana converses with Sohail in the same scene that includes the metaphor. The scene encompasses direct quotes from the dialogue between Rehana and Sohail which are interrupted by some comments by the narrator–a third person

limited narrator which takes Rehana's perspective as the main point of view. Rehana asks him about his toothache, Sohail answers and the narrator comments, then Rehana speaks in first-person point of view saying: "[a] toothache is the sort of thing I used to worry about. Now I worry about your legs, your heart, your life" (109). In this passage, Rehana actually embodies what Boehmer calls "nurturing roles" which symbolic national mothers in male narratives of the nation "briefly" play. Nevertheless, while the symbolic mothers that Boehmer denotes are assigned "[an] area of influence [which] is restricted and chiefly symbolic" (79), Rehana's influence is "real"–she helps the guerrillas in various ways providing shelter, food, clothes, and medication–and her presence is not at all brief, it rather continues and dominates throughout the whole narrative. This suggests that the novel intertwines the metaphoric and the "real" which at times makes it hard to distinguish between the two. The writer thus neither fully embraces nor completely rejects the tropes of nationalism which adds nuance to the usual representation of the mother in purely symbolic terms as I argue in this chapter.

Another level of symbolism that Rehana exhibits is when she stands for the nation itself. The two following passages emblematise this other facet of the symbolic maternal figure which Rehana represents. The first is a scene in which a mother of two guerrillas, Mrs. Bashir, asks Rehana if she has any information about her sons whom she did not see for a long time. At this moment, Rehana has to pretend that she hasn't seen any of Sohail's friends since the start of the war and that Sohail is not involved in the liberation struggle. Begging Rehana for information about her sons, Mrs. Bashir tells Rehana: "[p]lease, Mrs Haque, you are a mother also!". The narrator then comments, "[she]was something else–a mother, yes, but not just of children. Mother of a different sort" (140). Proclaiming Rehana to be a mother "not just of children" and that she has now become "Mother of a different sort" is a clear invocation of the figurative mother *as* nation. The word "Mother", which I argue might not

only be capitalised because it appears after a full stop, but because it emblematises an abstract maternal idea, recalls the fetishised "motherland" which is found in male nationalist writing. "Mother" recalls the idealisation and the abstractedness of the male nationalist conception of the figure of the mother. In another instance where Rehana symbolises Bangladesh, it is her maternal body which is brought into focus. In male nationalist literary texts, the maternal body is portrayed as an object of a male nationalist fantasy featuring either as lover or a mother. Male nationalist texts are abounded with the representation of female reproduction organs, Silva asserts that "breasts or womb" are the two organs through which the female body is often identified (24). The image of the woman as nation relies in its representation on the motifs of the "'pure' (and synonymously, maternal) body, spiritual, inviolable and intact" or on the "bruised, ravaged, raped and violated" female body (Silva 23). The following lines illustrate Anam's engagement with the trope of the woman as nation or nation as mother:

> [a]t thirty-eight, Rehana's body had finally caught up with its history. People who did not know used to assume she was a student, or that she was unmarried, because she didn't wear a wedding ring or a single piece of gold jewellery, but no longer. She had gained a little weight, and she enjoyed the occasional heaviness of her limbs, the stubborn, outward curve of her belly, the slight effort of movement, an awareness of breath and bone. Her new, comfortable shape came with new imperfections: the bowed line between nose and chin, the slight shadow above her lip, the thickening of her waist and ankles. All fortunate developments for Rehana, as they signified the battle-weary body of a woman who had passed years in the effort to raise her children. (49-50)

The first thing to note here is the context of this quote, which is very significant to understanding the way in which Anam juxtaposes the “real” and the metaphoric body of the mother. The changes that emerge in Rehana’s body seem to have appeared or to have gained significance with the growth of her nationalist belonging to Bangladesh. This parallel prepares the ground for the association or rather the equation of Rehana’s body with the emerging nation of Bangladesh. The features of this “battle-weary body” becoming thick, heavy, and developing lines–alluding to aging and tiredness–can be paralleled with male writers’ imagination of the woman as nation. The similarity that might be identified between Anam’s and male allegorisation of the female body recalls Silva’s idea of “the metaphor of the woman-as-terrain” which rests upon an equation “between the vulnerability of the female body and brutalised (feminised) land” (153).

However what makes Rehana’s equation with Bangladesh different than that of many male writers is the fact that Rehana’s body is not abstract–it is not an object of a male heroes fantasy–and it is not idealised as a sexualised body, like for instance in Léopold Senghor famous poem ‘femme nue, femme noire’ where the woman is portrayed as “desirable body” (Boehmer 24), or in Daud Haider’s ‘Bangladesh, Your Face’ where the nation is a lover who Haider longs for when “[he] intimately lie down with [his] head on [her] bosom longing for life” and for when he can “draw [her] tall body to [him] with tender love” (qtd. in Boehmer 24). Rehana has control over her sexuality, she neither personifies the “violated” raped body nor the sanctified “pure” maternal body. Rehana falls in love with the Major, a guerrilla who she nurses in her house, and she has a sexual encounter with him which the narrator describes in detail (257); Rehana’s love for the Major is “[a] swallowing, hungry love” (215).
Sabine Lauret-Taft considers Rehana’s love and sexual encounter with the Major as an

instance of "reclaiming women's bodies" (8) and similarly, Ruvani Ranasinha conceptualises this sexual encounter as a disruption of the long-standing image of "a sexually chaste symbol . . . and the gendered discourses of nationalism" which restricts and vilifies female sexuality (99n17). The analysis of some excerpts from Anam's text alongside passages from various male writers of nationalism suggests that *A Golden Age*'s depiction of the female nationalist figure is in line with the long-standing masculinist male tradition but also significantly departs from them. Anam does not completely reject the metaphorisation of the mother, which, as I will show shortly, is a choice that some writers make in their attempt to counter male exclusionary representation of women in nationalist literature, it nonetheless rejects the patriarchy that underlies a lot of male imagination of the nation. This negotiation of tropes creates a nuanced mother figure which complicates the image of the woman/mother in nationalist narratives but that also complicates the representation of "Third World" and migrant women/mothers in general. This means that the materiality, significance, and subjectivity of Rehana as a "real" character is not jeopardised because of the author's use of the nationalist trope of the allegorical mother.

This idea of the materiality of Rehana's body on the one hand and its allegorisation on the other evokes a fundamental discussion by feminist critics on the use of women and their bodies as symbols of the nation. The discussion centres on questions of agency and subjectivity and whether the re-enactment of the archetypal male tropes of the nation as woman/mother risks an erasure of female characters' subjectivity. In this regard, Mona Fayad argues that: "posited as begetter, inspirer and protector of male subjectivity. The disembodiment of Woman in the national narrative and her mythification render it impossible to position her as an agent of change" (149). Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts that: "[w]hen the woman's body is used *only* as a metaphor for a nation (or anything else) feminists correctly object to the effacement of the materiality of that body" (emphasis added

355). While Fayad and Spivak address the same theme in their quotes–writers' conflation of women and their bodies with the nation–Fayad's passage fully dismisses the allegorisation of women. However, Spivak does not share Fayad's stance which considers any use of the nation as a woman metaphor an effacement of her subjectivity. The word "only" in Spivak's quote is what makes her stance distinct from Fayad's. Both scholars' views exemplify the two main ways in which women writers have been engaging with and responding to the allegory of woman and nation.

Women writers of different writing traditions have responded to the allegorisation of the female body and of women in male nationalist literature and discourse in general. Innes contends that while in male nationalist literature women have featured as symbols of the nation, this portrayal of the woman as nation is "problematic" for postcolonial women writers (141). Boehmer explains that while "some women writers choose to distance themselves from the nation as extraneous to their concerns" (16), others choose to "explore the impact of the nation or postcolony on women by taking the risk of representing women's stories *as synonymous with* the nation's" (emphasis in original 202). The following are some names among many who have adopted either of the previous approaches in the representation of women in nationalist struggles. Iraqi writer Nazik al-Malaika wrote a poem entitled "Jamila", after Algerian female revolutionary Jamila Buhaired who was tortured by the French during the Algerian revolution, rejecting the "mythification" which is produced by "the 'extravagant songs' that threaten to drown Jamila more than her tears" (Fayad 148). The following verses in her poem indicate the poet's strong opposition to the metaphorisation of Buhaired to the point that she considers the act of metaphorising her to be more painful the physical torture that she suffered under the French occupation: "They have wounded her with knives/ we with words/ and the wounds afflicted by one's kin/ are far deeper than those afflicted by the French" (qtd. in Fayad 148). Another example which explicitly rejects the enactment of the

woman/mother metaphor is by Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifa in her novel *Bab as-Saha* (1990), where she writes against the objectification of women under nationalist symbolism: “wake up, clever boy. I'm not the mother or the land or the symbol. I am a person, I eat, drink, dream, make mistakes, get lost, get agitated, suffer, and talk to the wind. I’m not a symbol, I’m a woman” (qtd. in Fayad 148). This technique of counter narrating which consists of the complete rejection of the long-standing tropes of nationalism of mother of nation and mother as nation is to be found in other works by women writers. African writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo and Flora Nwapa choose to position “[their] women characters in the foreground rather than the background” as it is the case in texts of their male counterparts like Chinua Achebe (Innes147). Aidoo’s works reject symbolic women characters who stand for the nation in favour of a wide range of “real” characters like “rural and urban, mothers and daughters and friends, who are remarkable for their spirit, humour and resilience. They include teachers, doctors and market women, all of whom are given distinctive voices, often as the main narrators and commentators” (Innes 144). Also, Boehmer describes Nwapa’s works as being “situated outside traditional, male-centred narrative history” (95), and it is “precisely in its silences about nationalism”, that her novel *Efuru* could contest male nationalist texts such as those of Achebe and Ekwensi (Simon Gikandi 94).

The second way in which other writers, among them Anam, choose to represent women in nationalist struggles is as I mentioned above through “embracing” tropes like the metaphorization of women and domesticity. However, in their enactment of the tropes of nationalism in relation to women and their bodies, women writers choose to diverge from the typical mode of representation that characterises the writing of their male counterparts. In addition to the “literalisation” or “concretisation” of the metaphor of the woman as nation,

which I discussed earlier, women's texts "ironise" certain tropes and "reconfigure" them in a variety of ways as Bohemer maintains (207).

Rehana's reluctant nationalism can be read as a reflection of Boehmer's concept of ironisation of the trope of mother as nation or of the nation. Although she embodies these tropes, her personification contains various instances of ironisation which unsettle male construction of women in/as the nation. One of the instances where the metaphor of the mother is ironised is where Sohail brings her the flag of Bangladesh for the first time. In this scene which captures what is meant to signify a momentous occasion, everyone in the room around Rehana is extremely elated at the creation of Bangladesh's flag, "[a] few people clapped. 'Joy Bangla!' someone shouted . . . Maya whooped, draped the flag around her shoulders and ran to find a bamboo pole so they could secure it to the rooftop" (48). What Rehana thinks is highly ironic: "[a] flag without a country, Rehana thought, but didn't say" (48). This ironisation of what can be considered the essence of the metaphor of the mother in nationalist discourses–the nationalist zeal–is represented in another occasion when Rehana reveals her uncertain nationalism to the Major telling him: "I'm not sure I'm a nationalist" (141). Ironisation unsettles essential signifiers of the symbolic mother in nationalist narratives. As I have explained earlier in the discussion of Munir Chowdhury's representation of the figure of the mother as a metaphor, the mother is usually represented as a driving nationalist force, she is often the one who encourages her children to join the nationalist struggle to defend her, and subsequently, defend the endangered nation against colonial powers. Therefore, by revealing the mother's uncertain nationalism, the novel ironises a well-

established trope allowing for a more nuanced portrayal of the symbolic mother in nationalist plots.

Arundhati Roy and Yvonne Vera are two writers, from India and Zimbabwe respectively, whose implementation of gendered metaphors of the nation are comparable to Anam's. Vera's *Without a Name* portrayal of "Masvita *as symbol*" is reminiscent of the metaphor of the "Mother Africa figure" which is prominent in male nationalist narratives. Masvita displays the same characteristics of the typical mother as nation in that she too is "degraded, betrayed, violated, exploited" (Boehmer 195), however, like Rehana, she is also a "real" character who exemplifies, as Boehmer explains the life of an "underclass of abused, rootless women" in the nation (195). Roy's *The God of Small Things* revolves around the life of a mother, Ammu, and her twin children Estha and Rahel. The children experience a separation from their mother which can be read as India and Pakistan's separation, symbolised in the twin children, from Empire (Ammu/ Mother England) (Sutherland 213). The other separation that Estha and Rahel experience is when they are separated from each other. This split between the siblings can be considered a metaphor for the partition between Pakistan and India (Sutherland 213). The fact that Roy's and Vera's characters display characteristics that are different than the typical symbolic and idealised maternal presence of their male counterparts means that their works, like Anam's, engage in a nuanced way with the allegorisation of women in nationalist narratives. Vera's and Roy's representations of symbolic and "real" mothers/women are instances of "concretisation" or "literalisation" which accord women and mothers a "concrete" presence challenging the centrality of a male

nationalist hero which results in the marginalisation and silence of women in the nationalist plot.

The other instance of ironisation in *A Golden Age* is in relation to the association between the figure of the mother and domestic spaces and the attributes that are attached to both; mainly “stasis” and “purity”. Mothers and homes, generally speaking but in particular in nationalist discourses, have been associated with the preservation of culture and tradition. Therefore, they usually stand for protection and preservation in the face of change or potential “threat”. The element of culture that I would like to discuss here is language, often referred to as “mother tongue” in nationalist rhetoric. The mother tongue, as a shared language between the members of a group, is considered a core element in the formation of a common nationalist identity. This aspect of culture which is essential to the formation of a nation is to be fostered and preserved by mothers in the folds of domestic spaces. However, in Anam’s narrative, the idea of the mother as a preserver of language is ironised. In the next few paragraphs, I will explore a theoretical discussion of the space that language occupies in nationalist discourses. I will also discuss why the preservation and transmission of language and culture in general is consigned to women/mothers and performed in the domestic realm before I move to the examination of Anam’s engagement with the idea of mothers’ preservation of language and the representation of the house as a space of “stability” and “purity”.

Many theorists and critics have discussed the significance of language to the formation of nations and to nationalist struggles. Hobsbawm considers language, among other aspects such as a shared history and other cultural markers, to be one of the determining criteria for the establishment of a nation (7). However, being sceptical about the whole concept of a nation, Hobsbawm deems all those criteria such as “language, ethnicity or

whatever . . . fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous" (6). In discussing mother tongues, Benedict Anderson says: "[w]hat the eye is to the lover–that particular, ordinary eye he or she is born with–language–whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue–is to the patriot. Through that language encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed" (154). Anderson's quote sheds light on two important topics: the source of the mother-tongue being the mother, and the role that this mother tongue plays which is the construction and maintenance of a shared nationalist identity. This suggests that the language upon which the nation is formed and through which members form national allegiance originates from and is transmitted by the mother. The mother here appears as a source of origin echoing a sense of sameness and purity. Irene Gegalof argues that, "[t]he figure of the mother–and with her, the space of home and reproduction–is so often evoked as the site of sameness in the face of change" ("Interruption, Reproduction" 80). Elaborating on this idea of origin and sameness, Gedalof maintains that often the idea of birth "physical reproduction" is equated with cultural reproduction which involves "the passing of the same traditions, the same ways of behaving properly, of doing things" and these same cultural traits which are transmitted by mothers form the basis that binds people to "a pre-existing community or culture" ("Interruption, Reproduction" 73). Like Anderson's passage, Gedalof's quote emphasises the construction of the mother as a symbol of origin and of maintenance of cultural heritage and traditions.

In the context of Bangladeshi nationalism as well, language carries fundamental significance in discussions of nationalism. Silva claims that: "[t]he centrality of the Bengali language was interlinked with Bengali culture and mutually dependent on each, formulated the 'national' culture of the new nation–Bangladesh" (17). She examines a turning point in the history of Bangladesh–the Language Movement which reached its height in the 1950s and the riots that are associated with it and which make up for the setting in Munir Chowdhury's

play *Kabar* discussed earlier. The play captures the importance of the common mother tongue presenting it as a major, if not the, main reason for the conflict between the two parts[32]. The conflict between West and East Pakistan are exemplified in the impossibility of communication between the two wings. This communication barrier between the government in West Pakistan and the people in the Eastern part of the country who feel disenfranchised and oppressed is represented in the scene in which the Leader and Hafiz discuss ways of convincing the ghosts to remain in the grave rather than going out to protest. The Leader, a representative of the Pakistani government, tells Hafiz: "[w]ill it understand our language?" (qtd. in Silva 150). To bridge the gap between the two conflicting sides, Hafiz, being from East Pakistan, steps in and speaks to the ghosts. When the ghosts refuse to listen to him, he presents himself as a mother in disguise to the ghosts. This quote emphasises the role that a mother tongue and the mother figure for nationalists.

Like any other aspect of culture and tradition which the mother is responsible for protecting and delivering to the children of the nation, language is maintained and delivered in domestic arenas. Partha Chatterjee offers a comprehensive explanation to the longstanding association between women/mothers, the preservation of culture, and the domestic sphere in nationalist discourses with particular attention to the Bengal region. His exploration of this topic indicates that nationalism is a major discourse where the public and domestic are

[32] Yasmin Saikia explains that the war of 1971 has a different significance for Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. While for Bangladeshi's it is perceived as a liberation from the Pakistani colonial power, in India it is perceived as India's "triumph", and in Pakistan, the discourse is completely different, where it is considered "an act of 'betrayal' by the Bengalis" (3-4). In West Pakistan there was "[a] rhetoric of Hindu[s] as the enem[ies] of Muslim[s]" (48), and since East Pakistani people, explains Saikia, were considered "Hindu-like", acts of brutality against them were legitimised (50). A growing sense of injustice prevailed in East Pakistan as a result of the political, military, and socioeconomic imbalance which characterised the relationship between West and East Pakistan (Saikia 47-80). Events escalated until the West Pakistani government decided to launch a "military action 'over there'" against the "'enemies'" (Saikia 48). Saikia asserts that it was "state's attitude of favouritism" towards Urdu-speaking communities that caused "tensions" between the different communities of Pakistan (46). Language thus became a major actor in the conflict between both parts of Pakistan. The incident of the arrest and shooting of many university students protesting against the imposition of Urdu as the only national language on the 21st of 1952 became "a pivotal point in the development of a self-consciously Bengali national identity" (Nazil Kibria 15).

defined in essentially oppositional terms and where each of the spheres is associated exclusively with one gender. Throughout his book *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Chatterjee refers to the domestic sphere as the spiritual domain as opposed to the material domain. He asserts that in nationalist discourse, the spiritual domain is associated with women, whereas the material is linked to men. Chatterjee explains that "[t]he spiritual . . . is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity" (6). He adds that this spiritual domain is considered as the nation's "sovereign territory" where any intervention by the colonial power is strongly forbidden (6). Chatterjee also explores the role that women play within the inner domain in being cultural transmitters; he states, "[t]he home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing this quality" (126). Likewise, Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis summarise the role of women in the nation as follows: "to [re]produce its citizens, to ensure that cultural codes are transmitted, to maintain the sanctity of one's ethnic/national group and to act as signifiers of ethnic/national differences" (qtd. in Silva 22).

This stable and unchanging role of mothers of the nation as preservers of culture and tradition is ironised in *A Golden Age* on multiple occasions throughout the novel. One of the contexts in which the idea of culture preservation is presented ironically is in the scenes that highlight the cultural differences between East and West Pakistan. Cultural differences between the Eastern and Western parts of Pakistan were a major issue in the East Pakistanis uprising and they are strongly highlighted in *A Golden Age*. The narrator states: "[e]ver since '48, the Pakistani authorities had ruled the eastern wing of the country like a colony. First they tried to force everyone to speak Urdu instead of Bengali. They took the jute money from Bengal and spent it on factories in Karachi and Islamabad" (33). This indicates East Pakistanis' dissatisfaction with the uneven power dynamics that characterised the relationship

between the two parts of the country, with the West Pakistan government reigning supreme. Language, in this passage and many others, emerges as one of the most significant cultural markers that accentuates the gap between the people of the two wings in the novel. One of the scenes that capture the cultural conflict between the people residing on both ends of Pakistan is that of the encounter between Rehana and one of her sisters, Marzia, who lives in Karachi and who Rehana hasn't seen for many years. Marzia appears to intentionally accentuate the differences that now lie between her life in Karachi and Rehana's in Dhaka. The following extract reveals both Marzia's sense of superiority over and disappointment with Rehana, on account of her affiliation with Bangladesh:

> Marzia had behaved as though Rehana had betrayed them all; she had said things like, 'Your Urdu is not as good as it used to be; must be all that Bengali you're speaking.' She had pronounced it *Bungali*. And when she had referred to the servants at her house, she had said, 'Yes, we're very lucky, we have two *Bungalis*; Rokeya only has one and it's never enough, you know, the houses out there are so big. (18)

The way in which Marzia addresses Rehana's "different" Urdu accent illustrates her contempt for those of Bengali heritage. It seems as if Rehana's accent is now contaminated, and her sister is not content with this impurity. Pronouncing Bengali as "Bungali" can be read as Marzia's desire to stress her discontent with the changes that she notices in Rehana. Saying "Bungali" instead of Bengali creates a kind of distance and hierarchy between the two sisters especially when Marzia mentions that her and her family's servants are "Bungalis". This scene thus represents the dominant feelings of people residing on both sides of Pakistan. East Pakistanis were considered inferior to their Western counterparts for speaking a

language that is associated with India, the enemy of Pakistan, making them "Hindu-like" Muslims, as Saikia explains in the footnote above, and therefore less "pure".

Language also appears as an indication of characters' affiliation with either of the wings and it serves even as an indication of one's "true" nationalism. Several times, the characters refer to Urdu as the "language of the enemy". When Rehana tells the Major that she is not certain about her nationalism, the narrator states that Rehana thinks about "the well-loved volumes of Urdu poetry on her shelf, right next to the Koran" (141). Even Rehana, it seems, comes to internalise the idea that speaking "the language of the enemy" makes one's tongue less pure and hence affects one's nationalism. Moreover, the narrator's crucial statement: "Rehana did not have the exactness to become a true revolutionary" is preceded by a long description of the reasons why Rehana cannot be a "true" nationalist with notable reference to her "mixed tongue" and to "her love of Urdu, its lyrical lilts, its double meanings, its furrowed beat" (47).

The irony thus lies in the fact that Rehana, the mother who stands for the nation and who is the mother of the nation is a migrant, belonging to the Bihari minority who are speakers of Urdu. This means that Rehana, who has a "mixed tongue", is "unable to pretend . . . she could [not] replace her mixed tongue with a pure Bengali one" (47). By having a "mixed" tongue, Rehana ironises the trope of the mother as/of nation who preserves and protects the cultural heritage of the nation. Instead, Rehana transmits the love of Urdu poetry to her son Sohail (34). The "mixed" tongue ironises the "purity" and "stasis" of the nationalist mother tongue that the mother figure is expected to preserve and hand over to the young generations.

Remaining in the same realm of preserving and delivering a "pure" nationalist culture, I want to explore *A Golden Age*'s ironisation of the "spiritual domain" or the "inner" spaces

in which the sense of nationalist culture is meant to be fostered. Like the mother, who in typical male nationalist texts has certain qualities and duties, the domestic spaces in which this mother carries her nationalist duties consequently have a set of fixed attributes which qualify them to be at the centre of the construction and maintenance of a "pure" nationalist self. Domestic spaces feature as symbols of women's "purity" and "chastity" and of the "authenticity" of the nation's heritage. The domestic and the public spheres are often thought of to be the exact opposites of each other. With the public sphere envisaged as "a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests" (Chatterjee 120), the domestic becomes the ideal space for protecting women's, and subsequently, the national culture's "purity". In nationalist discourses, women's and domestic "purity" seem to be intertwined. The woman/mother protects the "purity", "authenticity", and "chastity" of the domestic space, considered the repository of the nationalist culture and identity, and her own "chastity" is protected in this very realm. This suggests that "[h]ome and hearth assumed an over-determined reality that women needed to protect and to be protected in" (Ketu Katrak 88). The woman/mother and the domestic space are not only entwined, they can even be seen as synonymous in nationalist discourses and literature. Both must be protected from the intrusion of the "enemy", and both have to be "chaste" and "pure" since they symbolise the origin and the transmission of nationalist identity and culture. This idea of the relationship between these elements is perfectly articulated by Tanika Sarkar:

> [v]ery often, an implicit continuum is postulated between the hidden, innermost private space, chastity, almost the sanctity of the vagina, [and] political independence at state level; as if, through a steady process of regression, this independent selfhood has been folded back from the public domain to the interior of the household, and then further pushed back into the hidden depths of an inviolate, chaste, pure female body. (265)

Commenting on the idea in the passage above, Gedalof makes a crucial remark regarding the result of such construction of the connection between the woman, the domestic, and the male nationalist. She concludes that such a view that links these three elements results in a denial of women's desire be it "sexual or political" (*Against Purity* 48). This equation of the woman's "chastity" and that of the domestic and their significance to the construction of the nation, which seems to result in the "desexualisation" and "depoliticization" of the woman, is made possible through the rhetoric of the idealisation of motherhood[33]. Samita Sen contends in this regard that: "[t]he idealisation of womanhood as the repository of tradition and the construction of the domestic sphere as the proper and rightful domain of women, involved a general valorisation of motherhood". Sen further explains that "[t]he ideal woman" is the one who creates and protects "the sanctuary of the home", she is also "the good and chaste wife", and she is "the iconic representation of the nation" (148). This almost sanctified link between mother, home, and nation is simultaneously maintained and problematised in *A Golden Age*. The problematisation of this link lies in the text's ironisation of the essence of both the mother and the domestic which is ostensibly their "chastity" and "purity".

In *A Golden Age*, the domestic features as both a space of chastity and transgression which problematises the notion of "chastity". Throughout the story, Rehana's houses represented what can be considered a domestic and ordinary day-to-day life of a widowed mother. The text is imbued with descriptions of places, like Rehana's garden and her house's and those of other characters' rooms, along with an emphasis on details and on description of

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[33] I borrow the term "depoliticisation" from Chatterjee as per his reference to the nationalists' dealing with "woman question". He discusses the idea that the "woman question" featured at the forefront of the reformists in the 19th century and it seemed to be left out with the nationalists in late 19th early 20th centuries. Chatterjee explains that the division of private/public spheres for the nationalists and with it the "relegation" of women to the domestic sphere has much more to it than being a result of the nationalists' belief that women's issues and position in the nation is mundane in comparison to other issues.

the atmosphere in various places. The writer describes Rehana's daily rituals that would typically start with an everyday dawn prayer, she is then often shown in the kitchen making breakfast and preparing to wake her children up. Rehana also takes care of her garden which has different fruit trees, "the mango tree, the lemon tree, the shouting-green banana tree" (16), and flowers, "Champa, bokul, rojonigondha. The yellow roses. The hibiscus bush" (269), and she frequently visits and is visited by her friend and neighbour Mrs. Chowdhury and her daughter Silvi. At earlier stages of the narrative, Rehana appears to embody the "ideal" of the "chaste" mother figure. The narrator states, "she had no intention of remarrying . . . ever since the children had returned, the urge to be loved in that way had disappeared from her altogether" (23). Rehana appears as a "desexualised" figure who is fully emersed in raising her children to the point that she lost the desire to be in romantic relationship altogether. Since the chastity of the mother is synonymous with the chastity of the domestic sphere, this inner domain is also made to be as "desexualised" as Rehana. The "purity" of the domestic sphere is later problematised by unsettling its depiction both as a "desexualised" and "depoliticised" space.

Domestic spaces in the novel do not remain separated from, or in Chatterjee's terms "unaffected" by what he calls "the profane activities of the material world" (120) for long. Soon after the start of the East Pakistani people's uprising, following Rehana's agreement to host the guerrillas in her house–Shona–and to bury their weapons in her garden, the same domestic rituals and spaces begin to be infused with the descriptive rhetoric of the war. The act of cooking and thinking about food and dishes' ingredients are details that are generally confined to the domestic realm; they are commonly perceived as apolitical. In these passages, however, these acts are considered equally, if not more important than the general context of nationalism in which they are situated. One of these examples is part of the scene of the flag which I examined earlier in relation to Rehana's uncertain sense of nationalism. In this scene

Sohail, his fellow guerrillas, and Maya are gathered for a meal at Rehana's house. Just before the scene of the flag, everyone in the room discusses the next meeting which Sheikh Mujibu Rahman will arrange. Sohail and his friends invite Rehana and urge her to attend because, as Sohail says, in that meeting "history will be made" (46). This makes Rehana ponder upon her nationalism, yet suddenly, this atmosphere of nationalism is interrupted with Rehana heading to the kitchen "wonder[ing] how she would feed all those hungry dreamers" (48). Sohail then intervenes: "Ammoo, we have a present for you". Sohail's intervention is likely to direct the readers to the nationalist mood again after it is interrupted by Rehana's thinking about feeding her guests. However, what follows Sohail's statement is another thought by Rehana about cooking and food. The narrator states, "Rehana had decided on khichuri, which was quick and meant there was no need to cook the dal separately. And she'd made omelettes with chilli and fried onions. The whole lot had been devoured in seconds" (48). Right after this, Sohail reveals the flag and nationalism comes back to the centre of the scene. This juxtaposition of the domestic and the public shows that the domestic is not really apolitical, and that domestic and the public are not really separated and detached as male nationalist writing and discourse often portray.

Not only is the domestic "affected" by the rhetoric of nationalism, its "chastity" is ironised by the sexual relationship between Rehana and the Major and which takes place *in* her house. The following is a small extract from the long description of the sensual encounter between Rehana and the Major, the narrator states: "[h]ands tunnelling under her, lifting her up, swinging her out of the room. Three long strides to the garden gate, kicking it open . . . Swivelling past the gate, through Shona's front door, her bare feet brushing the frame" (256). The narrator then proceeds to describe Rehana's feelings after the Major has left, "Rehana made for the kitchen, but then stopped, decided to lie down instead. It was still an hour till sunrise. She closed her eyes and remembered. Just once. Above her, the ceiling fan moved

slightly, pushed by the swirl of November air floating through the veranda. Her skin was awash with scents, his water-melon breath, his burned-rubber sweat" (258). The description of the certain parts of the house is very significant when it is intertwined with the description of the sensual moment between Rehana and the Major. What is ironic in this passage is the fact that the domestic which is meant to be a place where the mother's chastity is protected is the very place where Rehana has the intimate relationship with the Major. Passing through gates, doors, and frames is highlighted in the passage that features the erotic moment between Rehana and the Major. This might be read as an allusion to the easy penetration of this domestic sphere which is meant to be impenetrable and closed to any "unchaste" acts. However, the doors and the gates are easily opened when the Major makes his way to the room.

The argument that I would like to put forward as per the above illustration of the novel's "ironisation" of the static attributes of the mother and the domestic, and the examination of the "literalisation" of the mother figure is the fact that women's writing can simultaneously build upon and also depart from patriarchal literary tropes of the nation. This complex engagement with tropes that are often associated with patriarchal imaginations of the nation indicate that the nation and even tropes that have been considered patriarchal and oppressive to women can still be inhabited by women and used by women writers to present nuanced modes of nationalist identities and agencies.

Aside from the ironisation of the domestic, its sanctity, and its protectiveness of culture and tradition, domestic spaces in *A Golden Age* are valued and are presented as spaces of potential rather than imprisonment. In chapter two of the thesis, I argued that the domestic along with the activities that are perfumed inside it by women might be perceived signifiers of women's oppression. I examined *One Hundred* as a novel that challenges such a

reductionist view of the domestic sphere. I explored the text's construction of the kitchen as a creative space that transcends restrictive views through presenting it as a space of female solidarity, a space in which migrant identities are negotiated, and through examining Nair's blurring of the line that divides the domestic and the public spheres. As I said above when I discussed the "ironisation" of the domestic realm, that both spheres are separate from each other. Inderpal Grewal asserts that unsettling "the binary of home/outside, private/public" is achieved through "[r]esistance [which] is articulated by showing these to be infiltrated by each other rather than being inviolate" (230). I argue here that *A Golden Age* reclaims the potential of the domestic through focusing on the daily routine of Rehana and through the extensively detailed description of domestic spaces and activities such as cooking and sewing.

Generally, stories like those by Anam, Vera, and Roy, that are considered counter narratives to certain male narratives of the nation are centred in locations that are often thought of as mundane and that have been overlooked in male writing of the nation. These stories that are focused on women and their day-to-day lives and activities in the private sphere are referred to as small, or as Jean-François Lyotard' calls them as "petit récit", which can be translated as "small narrative", as opposed to grand narratives of history by male writers (qtd. in Bohemer 220). For instance, the very title in *The God of Small Things* can be read as references to small stories that are often unheard of. Boehmer claims that Roy presents a contrast between "the gods of the 'small'–the personal, the domestic as against those associated with bigger 'things'–national history" (198). This reminds one of what Anam states, as I mentioned earlier in my introduction of the novel, that her novel was initially intended to be an epic story then it turned to be a novel about what is usually not heard about, a story of a mother and her children in the war. What these novels bring to the

fore in their representation of women as/in the nation is “location and locale–the rooms, stores, verandas, villages, where women’s lives unfold” (Boehmer 190).

Anam’s emphasis on the domestic dominates the novel. I will here present a few examples that illustrate the writer’s insistence on bringing to the fore domestic spaces and activities highlighting their importance to Rehana’s subjectivity. By doing this, Anam demolishes the binary opposition between what is public (typically considered empowering and active) and the domestic (stereotypically thought of as oppressive and passive). The first example from *A Golden Age* that I want to scrutinise is about Rehana’s preparation of breakfast, the narrator says:

> [s]he hurried to the kitchen and thought about breakfast. It was the last breakfast for a few weeks. Tomorrow was the start of Ramzaan. For one month they would eat before dawn and not again until sunset. She mixed flour and water and worked the dough with her fingers. She rolled out flat disks, enjoying the quick, steady movement. The kitchen was orange with the coming sun; she stacked the chapattis on the edge of the counter and covered them with a damp square of muslin. (244)

The quote shows the writer’s close attention to details about food preparation, how Rehana feels about the process of making the bread, and even the cloth’s material and shape which she uses to cover her bread with are mentioned. This attention to details gives value to the act of cooking. Cooking is not a banal task, it is rather a meaningful act for Rehana and, as I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to *One Hundred*, it is an act of reclamation of female subjectivity through valuing what might be thought of as domestic, implying passive, territories and acts. About writers’ depiction of characters who embrace the domestic to

reclaim their subjectivity and agency, Lindsey Moore writes: "women's projects of individual emancipation tend to have a wider, decolonizing significance, and that a movement from the private to the public sphere, while obviously desirable in some ways, is not the only possible feminist trajectory" (24).

Another passage that I want to examine here in relation to *A Golden Age*'s depiction of Rehana's relationship to the domestic sphere is concerned with the text's blurring of the line that separates the domestic and public spheres. This following passage delineates Rehana and her female friends' contribution to the war effort. The women are contributing by sewing blankets to the soldiers who are in the battlefield. The quote sheds light on the whole process of making the blankets. The process resembles the preparation for an armed battle in the tone in which the details are brought forward and in the amount of effort that each woman brings in to realise them. The following is a short excerpt which captures some of the nuance that characterises the writer's description of the women's sewing or as Mrs. Akram suggests they call it "Project Rooftop" (97):

> Rehana called Mrs Rahman and Mrs Akram to the bungalow. 'Follow me,' she said, leading them up the stairs to the roof. She had laid out a jute pati and a few cushions. The saris were stacked up in a basket. Beside the basket was Rehana's sewing box. The box contained a row of needles and a bundle of black spools. There were small pattern cutouts and a collection of thimbles. A tomato-shaped pin-cushion. (92)

The narrator's detailed description of what the women are planning to do to help in the war effort shows how much the women value their contribution to the war efforts. It shows that these women's job is no less important than that of men in the battlefield. Regarding the analogy between the women's sewing project and armed battles, Lauret-Taft contends that: "[t]he regularity with which they meet, combined with Mrs Rahman's endeavour to enlist

everyone she knows, evokes a military operation" (3). She adds that: "using their domestic role as an advantage to assert themselves as individuals" (4), Anam's characters become, "activists at home" (3). Lauret-Taft idea of activists at home serves to break the binary opposition between the two spheres making the activities that women do at home as significant and as empowering as the activities practised outside the house. The other example that I want to propose stresses the daily morning ritual of Rehana in the house:

> [she] turned back to the bungalow and entered the drawing room. She ran her palm across the flat fur of the velvet sofa, the dimpled wood of the dining table. The scratched, loved, faded whitewash of the veranda wall. She unfurled her prayer mat, pointed it westwards and sank to her knees. This was the start of the ritual: wake before sunrise, feel her way around the house; pray; wake the children. (16-7)

The consistency of what Rehana does daily does not seem to make her bored or feel restricted. On the contrary, the passage evokes a sense of gratitude which can be deduced from the narrator's description of the house items. For instance, the idea that the "scratched" and "faded" whitewash are loved, as if the aging signs on the walls of the veranda are very significant to the point that feeling them invokes a sense of reassurance. This is evoked in another passage which describes Rehana's feelings whenever she looks at the house that she built to regain her children after losing their custody following their father's death. The narrator explains that: "Rehana looked at the house with pride and a little ache. It was there to remind her of what she had lost, and what she had won. And how much the victory had cost", the narrator adds, "[t]hat is why she had named it *Shona*, gold. It wasn't just because of what it had taken to build the house, but for all the precious things she wanted never to lose again" (16). This attention to the domestic, as I said in the thesis introduction, "challenge[s] the devaluation of the private sphere as a static, unproductive and uncreative space" (Newns 12). It might be read as an invitation of readers to consider embracing the domestic as another

way of asserting women's subjectivity in addition to joining the public sphere which is normatively established as an acknowledged route toward self-realisation and agency.

The above passages which as I argued demonstrate the importance of the domestic to Rehana's subjectivity can be read in contrast with other texts by women writers in which the domestic features as space of confinement to show that what is considered in one text a source of fulfilment can be seen in another as a source of oppression. I will here briefly discuss the difference between *A Golden Age* and texts that give value to the domestic, and other texts where the domestic is presented as a prison from which the protagonist has a strong desire to escape. This negative representation of the domestic can read as a response to patriarchal tendencies of confining women to domestic space in order to limit them and to supress their power and creativity. This patriarchal ideology of disempowering women which undoubtedly prevails in most, if not all societies, appears in a lot of male writing. One example of male writing that uses domesticity as a way of restricting women rather than empowering them is, as the above discussion revealed, male nationalist writing in which women do not feature as a subject.

Rosemary Marangoly George explores the representation of the domestic in novels by Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. She claims that what she finds "striking about this fiction" is the recurrence of "essentially the same plot: the novel or short story begins on the eve of a domestic crisis for the young or middle-aged female protagonist– a husband's loss of job, a divorce, an extramarital affair, an unpleasant encounter with suffering, a cross-cultural confrontation" (132). She explains that this incident, or "crisis" as she calls it, "force[s] the protagonist" to take a "period of self-examination [which] is followed by a return (often with relief) to her life of domestic boredom, which she may have earlier found stultifying, *or* by a rejection of the entire enterprise of domesticity" (emphasis

in original 132). If one reads *A Golden Age* alongside these South Asian texts, which most often trace a protagonist's journey of negotiating a sense of self, one concludes that *A Golden Age* is comparable to but also different from these texts. The similarity between those texts and Anam's is that they all of them focus on the lives of women and on their self-realization. However, both modes of writing diverge in the fact that Deshpande's, Desai's and Sahgal's protagonists' self-realization, which does not necessarily materialise at the end of the narrative, lies in the protagonist's emancipation from the "chains" of domesticity. Anam's narrative is different in that her protagonist does not find domesticity "immured"; it does not signify entrapment for Rehana.

However, it is worth mentioning that Rehana's adoption of the domestic sphere, even if as I argued this adoption is different than characters of male writing of the nation and more complex, can still be considered patriarchal. This means that embracing tropes that are associated with male objectification of women can be read as regressive even if they are in fact not represented as sources of the protagonist's oppression. Cara Cilano contends that: "*A Golden Age* sacralizes the domestic sphere through violence, thereby reifying a patriarchal nationalism . . . The novel's very title immediately hints at such a nostalgic rendering of this time in history" (122). She also asserts that: "the inviolability of [Rehana's] family [is] defined in heteronormative and, indeed, patriarchal terms" (122). Her complete dismissal of Anam's representation of the domestic and motherhood is reminiscent of the reaction of some women writers to the metaphorisation of women/mother in nationalist writing–which I stated earlier–that considers any metaphorisation a replication of masculinist allegories.

The question that one might pose here is how can a character achieve agency and subjectivity through embracing "what appear to be instruments of [her] own oppression"

(8)[34]? The fact that Rehana does not enact the tropes of nationalism as they are typically prescribed in male narratives of the nation might evoke Butler's ideas of performativity and subjectivation. What I find relatable between Butler's ideas and *A Golden Age*'s dealing with tropes and norms lies in Butler's idea of repetition with a difference which I evoked in the previous chapter discussing the power dynamics between Nalini and her children. She explains that an individual becomes a subject through repeating the very norms of his/her subjugation, "[w]e are going to repeat them [norms], they work on us, they work through us, we reproduce them. But it may be that in the midst of repetition we repeat with a difference" ("Improvisation" 28). This idea of "reproduce[ing]" the norms and at the same time repeating them "with a difference" is to a significant extent applicable to Rehana's relationship with the norms in that she is always acting *within* the norms and the tropes and she at times, as I have demonstrated in the analysis, performs them *differently*. However, if one considers this engagement with the typical construction of women in nationalist narratives only in light of Butler's insight, one might not have a full understanding of Anam's negotiation of nationalist and social norms of domesticity and motherhood. The two most important concepts in Butler's theorisation of performativity and subjectivation, which are relevant here to Anam's representation of her character's relationship with norms, are "resistance" and "constraint". In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler asserts that the subject "iterat[es]" norms "under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo" (95). Butler's description of norms suggests that these norms under and through which subjects operate are essentially

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[34] I use this statement from Mahmood's *The Politics of Piety* which she quotes from Janice Boddy. Mahmood critiques Boddy and other scholars' work for trying to spot *any* form of resistance by women against the norms and traditions of their societies, and that, as she explains, "even in instances when an explicit *feminist* agency is difficult to locate, there is a tendency among scholars to look for expressions and moments of resistance that may suggest a challenge to male domination" (emphasis in original 8). This means that there is an excessive emphasis on resistance as the signifier of agency and even when women who these scholars conduct their research on embrace their cultures or traditions, scholars continue to chase "moments of disruption of, and articulation of points of opposition to, male authority–moments that are located either in the interstices of a woman's consciousness (often read as nascent feminist consciousness), or in the objective effects of women's actions, however unintended these may be" (8).

negative. This very idea of negativity in perceiving norms, implying the necessity to resist as a condition for agency, is the reason why considering Rehana's "performance" of nationalist norms only from Butler's perspective is partial. This is because theorising agency and subjectivity, Butler's work, as Mahmood explains, is "subservient . . . to her overall interest in tracking the possibilities of resistance to the regulating power of normativity" (22)[35]. This means that although in her discussion of power, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Butler insists on the importance of not viewing power and agency as contradictory, her theorisation of agency foregrounds resistance of norms.

Confining agency to resistance is thus exclusive and limiting to the meaning of agency. The perception of Rehana's character as one who becomes a subject only through resistance is not fully accurate. Mahmood's theoretical insights become particularly significant here to conceptualise *A Golden Age*'s engagement with the metaphorisation of the female body and domesticity, and to understand Rehana's agency. This is owing to the fact that Mahmood's perspective about women's agency accounts for instances of agency that do not necessarily entail resistance. In *A Golden Age*, tropes or norms (such as the metaphor or nation as mother and domesticity) are not presented as essentially evil or as sources of women's oppression. By showing that tropes of nationalist discourse can be "inhabited in a variety of ways", to use Mahmood's terms, the novel eases, for instance, the metaphor of nation as woman/mother and the concept of domesticity from the patriarchal aspects that are attached to them. What is most useful in Mahmood's writing about agency is her approach to the nature and significance of norms. Instead of looking at norms as a source of "constraint", Mahmood argues that norms "are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and

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[35] I should mention that Butler differs from "progressive" feminist ideas about women's agency, freedom, and autonomy, in that she considers norms to be both sources of oppression and at the same time they are the very sources of subjectivity. This is discussed in great detail in Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*, check pages 47-8. I also touched upon this idea in "Chapter Two" when I discussed Butler's "subjectivation".

consummated" (23), therefore, "what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility . . . may actually be a form of agency" (15). This approach to norms broadens the meaning of agency, "agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (Mahmood 15). Nonetheless, one cannot argue that Rehana's negotiation with the tropes that are usually associated with women's oppression comes always under the form of acceptance. I want to argue that the novel's representation of the protagonists' engagement of norms of nationalism and tradition is a dual act of acceptance and resistance.

Consequently, what seems to be a comprehensible way of looking at *A Golden Age*'s representation of agency is the combination of insights from Butler's and Mahmood's theories. This is because, as I maintained above, Butler's theory of agency focuses more on instances of resistance and subversion than on occasions where norms are not considered confining. While for Mahmood, despite arguing that norms "are inhabited in a variety of ways", her study focuses more on instances of acceptance of norms at the expense of other ways among which resistance is meant to be one. In discussing the idea of "Third World" women's agency and its relationship with women's interaction with norms of society and tradition, Jaspal Kaur Singh asserts that "[i]n looking at women's oppression, postcolonial feminism does not simply apply Western feminist notions of liberation and reject traditional cultural and familial practices; instead, it examines social institutions and their practices for selective acceptance or rejection" (11). Although her passage refers to postcolonial feminist theory and literary criticism, I argue that the idea in her passage is relatable to the representation of agency in postcolonial and "Third World" women's literary texts. Accordingly, I here argue that Anam's representation of norms in relation to her protagonist's sense of agency and subjectivity, in the above section norms of nationalism and in the

following section societal norms of motherhood, can be considered a process of "selective acceptance or rejection" to use Singh's terms.

2.2 The representation of "real" migrant motherhood

Another aspect that is paramount to the representation of Rehana's agency and subjectivity is her role as a mother, and more precisely, her experience as a migrant mother. In *A Golden Age*, the representation of "real" motherhood is as important as the representation of the metaphoric maternal presence. However, I contend that the study of Rehana as a "real" mother has not gained as much critical attention as examinations of her as a symbolic maternal character. Even when the "real" migrant maternal figure is discussed, the topic is addressed as a means used by Anam to disrupt the usual equation of the mother/woman and her body with the nation in nationalist narratives. This means that the author's contribution to the body of work about "real" motherhood is overlooked. One might argue that literary criticism's focus on the study of the representation of the mother in relation to nationalism and its allegories is justified since the novel is about a historical moment and about the role of women and mothers in nationalist struggles which is usually side-lined. Although I do not disagree with this argument, I would like to also claim that the study of "real" motherhood and "real" migrant maternal subjectivity are equally important. The study of "real" motherhood reveals the text's significant contribution to the ongoing feminist discussion of motherhood and its representation.

As I have explained in the previous chapters, and in this chapter so far, the voice of the mother has been obscured by many discourses and ideologies. Patriarchy, nationalism, and even feminism have objectified mothers even when they claim to be representing them. This for instance is evident in masculinist nationalist writing which glorifies but at the same

time silences the figure of the mother. This is also evident in some feminist writing that takes "daughterly" and "sisterly" points of view to speak *for* the mother instead of according her a voice to tell her own story. In representations of motherhood where the mother does not appear as a subject in her own right, she most often bears specific characteristics and roles. In nationalist narratives, she is typically a metaphor, as per the above discussion, she is either an asexual chaste figure or she features as an object of a male hero's sexual fantasies. She is the origin and the preserver of culture and tradition, and she never obtains a "concrete" presence; she remains symbolic. Even in narratives of the nation that are narrated from the perspective of daughters, who are largely absent in male narratives, "the subjectivity of mothers (including the much symbolised national mother) is to a large degree displaced in order to foreground the subjectivity of daughters" (Boehmer 120). This jeopardisation of the maternal voice and subjectivity is not strictly confined to the writing of the nation from a daughter's perspective. In literature in general, "[n]ot only has the mother been lost to the broader traditions of literary history that have privileged narratives by and about male figures, but also she has been lost within the daughter-centric literatures" (Podnieks and O'Reilly, *Textual Mothers* 12). Podnieks and O'Reilly add that the mother in these narratives of daughters, is represented, but "she is absent to her children (almost always daughters) and to her self in that her own voice is silent, her subjectivity lacking or erased" (12). As I explained in the thesis introduction, this absence, which as Podnieks and O'Reilly contend results in mothers occupying object positions, is also applicable to migrant literary texts. There is thus a tendency in male as well as female writing where the mother does not appear as a subject to associate, if not to equate, her with tradition. In women's writing, this link between the mother and tradition, as I demonstrated in often bears a negative significance since tradition is a lot of the time associated with patriarchy and backwardness. This association explains a recurrent trope in women's writing where the protagonist manifests a strong desire to

disassociate from both her mother and the tradition of her country of origin whether or not she is a migrant writer.

Many South Asian texts, by writers writing in South Asia or in the West, represent daughters' desires to separate from their mothers and from the culture and tradition of their country of origin. Ruth Maxey addresses the mother-daughter conflict in South Asian literature and in texts by South Asian women writers in the United States. Maxey argues that in many South Asian literary texts, "[f]ictional mothers are variously depicted as small-minded, materialistic, controlling and unsympathetic towards their daughters" ("Mother-Weights" 25). Maxey states many texts that depict a fraught mother-daughter relationship which becomes a, if not the most, fundamental reason for the daughter to migrate to the US[36]. She states as examples of texts that feature daughter protagonists whose decision to leave their countries of origin is largely motivated by the disturbed relationship that they have with what is portrayed as "dysfunctional, absent, emotionally unavailable, or unloving biological" mothers (26), Meena Alexander's novel, *Manhattan Music* (1997), Kirin Narayan's *Love, Stars, and All That* (1994), and Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season* (2003).

The above, however, does not mean that the maternal voice remains supressed to this day. There have been, as I argued in the thesis introduction, many successful attempts by women writers to reclaim the mother's voice. Nevertheless, writing the maternal from the mother's perspective remains a contested terrain. The challenge of women writers who portray the mother as a subject in her own right becomes how to (re)write the maternal without idealising it and without reinscribing patriarchy. Many women writers challenge patriarchal motherhood being an instrument of patriarchy that is used to disempower women

[36] Although Maxey's study is centred on texts produced by either South Asian or American South Asian writers, the core idea of her article, which is the conflictual mother-daughter relationship that reflects the texts' protagonists desire to escape South Asia, is also present in the writing of South Asian writers in Britian as I already illustrated in chapter two.

by presenting a negative image of motherhood. To do so, they replace the passive, victim, oppressed mother by maternal figures that are "non-normative"[37]. The patriarchal perceptions of motherhood, also referred to as "normative" motherhood, that women writers tend to resist limit motherhood to a specific model of a married, loving, nurturing mother. This archetypal image of the idealised and romanticised mother marginalises, excludes, and even condemns other modes of maternal subjectivities. Katrak asserts that postcolonial women writers writing against the "mystification" and idealisation of motherhood especially "challenge the romanticization of motherhood as motherland, mother earth, woman as earth-goddess possessing mysterious powers of fertility . . . reveal[ing] certain negative, even violent experiences of motherhood" (211). By presenting violent experiences of motherhood, women writers unsettle the prescribed models of motherhood that are established by patriarchal motherhood within which "woman as wife and mother is valorized; [while] single women, lesbians, and widows face prejudice" (Katrak 157). Although this counter narrative of motherhood which is based on emphasising negative experiences of motherhood allows for the acknowledgement of different maternal subjectivities, it creates a kind of exclusive binarism which, like patriarchal motherhood, dismisses another side of motherhood. I want to argue that this potential binarism can be mediated by the construction of more complex mother figures.

With numerous representations of absent, passive, unloving, and or cruel mothers by daughters seeking self-realisation through distancing themselves from their mothers, and representations of mothers' voices that challenge patriarchal motherhood by bringing to the fore "non-normative" maternal characters, an important aspect of motherhood is lost and confound with, what Andrea Liss calls, "essentialism [and] romanticised qualities" (xviii) of

[37] I explained in the "Introduction" that "non-normative" is a term used to refer to mothering that does not conform to "normative" or "traditional" motherhood and which often include the idea of the all-loving, devoted, self-sacrificial mother.

motherhood. What becomes noticeable is the modest existence of portrayals of the positive feelings of mothers or aspects of motherhood that come to be associated with patriarchal motherhood such as love and care. I want to argue that *A Golden Age*'s contribution to the existing literature on the representation of motherhood is in line with Liss's motivation behind writing her book, *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, which is to "revalue[] certain traditional characteristics of the maternal, such as nurturance, care, empathy, and passion . . . [and to] see [them] anew as loving and political acts" (xxi). Building on the above discussion, Anam's representation of motherhood complicates the image of the motherhood through many ways including the problematisation of the very significance of "normative" motherhood. Rehana is a loving, caring, and devoted mother, these qualities of the "normative" mother are clearly emphasised through the narrative. Some of the examples that I stated when I discussed metaphoric motherhood are applicable in this context of "real" motherhood since as I explained the metaphoric and the "real" are intertwined in Anam's novel. The example of the nurturing mother who worries about her son's health and life (109), and the passage that shows Rehana's lack of interest in being loved by a man because of her fear for her children's wellbeing around a stranger (23) are only two examples that can be read as signs of "normative" motherhood. Other significant instances in the text where Rehana exhibits "ideals" of "normative" motherhood are in expressions she either tells her children or that she says to herself which reveal her love for her children. One example is a scene of Rehana and Maya discussing the year which the children spent in Lahore with their uncle Faiz after he wins the case against Rehana's custody of her children after her husband's death. That year is the most traumatising experience for Rehana. To reassure her mother that nothing bad happened to them when they were away, Maya says, "[t]he year we were in Lahore–we never talk about it" (245). It is worth mentioning that Maya says these words to her mother after over ten years of her and her brother's reunion with their mother. However,

the event still evokes feelings of sadness for Rehana, "[i]mmediately Rehana's eyes began to water" (245), the narrator says. While for Maya, "it was only a year", for Rehana, she tells Maya, "It was a lifetime" (245). She adds: "I would have given anything–my life—" (245) to gain them back. On a different occasion, when Sohail tells his mother that by helping him she is saving his life, Rehana thinks, "*My life is your life*" (italics in original 170). The last example that I want to refer to here and which accentuates Rehana's love for her children is when she tells the Major, "you don't think I can love something other than my children? I can. I can love other things", when he tells her, "But not as much", she thought to herself and confirmed, "No, not as much" (182-83). These are few among many examples in the text that illustrate Rehana's passionate love for her children which might be misread as an indication of the text's endorsement of patriarchal motherhood.

Despite being associated with "normative" motherhood, often linked or even equated with patriarchal motherhood, these qualities of love, passion, care, and devotion are presented in the novel as sources of Rehana's subjectivity and empowerment. Rehana who after her husband's death is seen as a weak, young widow with no financial support, is able to stand on her own feet because of her desire and termination to gain the custody of her children. The love of her children becomes Rehana's drive to becoming strong and financially independent. She changes from someone feeling defeated by grief (8-9) and by the loss of her children, to being determined to build a big house and rent it out so she could gain back her children and raise them, she tells the workers: "[m]ake the house as big as possible", the narrator explains, this "was Rehana's only request. [To] [m]ake it grand" (36). This request suggests Rehana's hope and willpower to reunite with her children and to never lose them again.

Nevertheless, Anam's text does not romanticise the experience of motherhood or highlight only the positive aspect of motherhood and denies what Barbara Almond terms "the

dark side of motherhood" (108). Like *The Translator* and *One Hundred*, *A Golden Age* also features a fraught mother-child relationship and even maternal ambivalence as a way to add nuance to the image of the mother. One of the ways whereby Anam avoids romanticising motherhood is through highlighting Rehana's maternal ambivalence which, as I established in all previous chapters, is used by women writers to complicate the representation of motherhood. Rehana's ambivalence is mostly felt towards her daughter Maya. Rehana's love for Sohail is unquestionable, "[he] was her first-born, and so tender" (75). For Maya, however, the narrator says, "Rehana often wondered if she could help loving one child better. She had a blunt, tired love for her daughter. It was full of effort" (75). This idea of loving a male child more than the female one recalls the South Asian daughters' texts that depict inequality between siblings as a major contributor to the conflicting relationship they have with their mothers[38].

What is interesting in Rehana's relationship with Maya is the difference that exists between *A Golden Age*'s depiction of mother-daughter conflict and the way in which this conflict can be found to be depicted in other stories which are narrated from a daughter's perspective. While in certain daughter-centred narratives, the fraught relationship between the mother and the daughter is seen only from the daughter's point of view, in Anam's narrative the reader has access to the mother's story and to her own feelings and dilemmas about her maternal ambivalence. In *A Golden Age*, Rehana's preference of Sohail over Maya comes as a heavy burden on Rehana's shoulders, [she] thought of it as her biggest failure. That her daughter had not found a way into her heart" (77). Instead of appearing as unloving, cold, and unsympathetic, as Maxey asserts in her study mentioned earlier, Rehana seems to suffer from her inability to love Maya as much as she loves Sohail. This idea of presenting a

[38] For a comprehensive discussion of works that delineate mothers' preference of male offspring, check Lau, 83-85 where she lays out reasons for mothers' preference of sons over daughters, and page 132 for the representation of this gender inequality.

nuanced experience of maternal ambivalence is reminiscent of the idea of associating negative attitudes of mothers towards their daughters to the mothers' internalisation of patriarchal ideologies which as I mentioned in chapter one and two dominates many works by writers of Arab/Muslim and "Third World" heritage. The scene that captures Rehana's dilemma the most and which makes this issue of preferring sons more complex than it is usually depicted in daughters' narratives is when Rehana tells her friends that she slapped her daughter, "'We know she hasn't exactly been easy,' Mrs Rahman said. 'But you've always been–a little more unforgiving of Maya'" (93). The fact that her friends noticed her harshness with Maya and that they do not consider it a normal attitude presents this problem in a different light. What Maxey refers to as "the daughters' simplistic belief that their mothers unthinkingly perpetuate patriarchal ideas" (Mother-Weights 29), is resisted in the depiction of the mother-daughter conflict in *A Golden Age*. Rehana answers her friend furiously: "Unforgiving? Me? I'm only one person–I have to do everything–is it possible, humanly possible?" (93). The narrator states that Rehana does not disagree with what her friends tell her about her unequal treatment of the children, she says, "[b]ut she [Rehana] knew they were right. The knowledge burned inside her, but she couldn't bring herself to say it. You're right. I've been unfair" (93). Although Rehana admits her unfair treatment to herself, the reason behind her unequal treatment continues to be unknown and she continues to be burdened by it. Rehana's struggle with her negative feelings for Maya and her unsatisfaction with the fact that she loves her son more than her daughter problematise the idea of mothers' complicity with patriarchy. Nonetheless, a scene of a dialogue between Rehana and Maya discloses lack of communication and prejudice as barriers between the mother and her daughter. This coming passage, which I will quote at some length, illustrates the impact that the prejudice that both Rehana and Maya have for each other on their bond. This incident might seem

trivial, yet, it is possible to read this as a moment of reconciliation between mother and daughter. The scene is about Rehana offering to trim Maya's hair ends:

> "There's nothing wrong with my hair," Maya said. Her first instinct was always to say no to everything. "What's wrong with my hair?"
>
> "Nothing. I just want to trim the edges. Look at this," Rehana said, showing Maya the tatty end of her braid. "I'll just make it straight."
>
> "How do you know how to cut hair?"
>
> "I've always known. My sisters made me cut theirs." Right here, in Calcutta. And she used to cut her father's, when they were poor and there was no more credit at the barber's.
>
> "Really? How is it you never cut mine?"
>
> "You never let me get near your hair! I used to cut Sohail's." Maya smiled wryly.
>
> "Yes, I think I remember now. I always thought it was because he was your favourite."
>
> "Na, it was because you were so stubborn."
>
> "Go ahead, then, let's see what you can do." (227-28)

The quote reveals that while Rehana thinks that her daughter has a tendency "to say no to everything" and that she is "so stubborn", Maya thought that the reason her mother does not cut her hair because she loves Sohail more. This scene reflects reconciliation between Rehana and Maya. It also adds nuance to the representation of maternal ambivalence and to the portrayal of motherhood in general since maternal ambivalence is considered a trait of "non-normative" motherhood. Moreover, the secene broadens the meaning of maternal ambivalence because here maternal ambivalence is not instigated by the mother figure's

internalisation of or complicity with patriarchy but rather by lack of communication and prejudice.

Challenging the simplistic association between maternal ambivalence and patriarchy does not however mean that the novel does not address the issue of patriarchy and patriarchal motherhood. One way in which Anam eschews the idealisation of motherhood is through explicitly acknowledging and exposing the existence of patriarchy and its desire to control and manipulate mothers. One of the most important instances in the text where Anam shows the exclusivist view of patriarchal motherhood is in a scene at the court. In this scene, Rehana faces a judge, and her brother-in-law Faiz who wants to take her children to live with him and his wife in Lahore. The narrator says: "[t]he judge said Rehana had not *properly* coped with the death of her husband. She was too young to take care of the children on her own. She had not taught them the proper lessons about Jannat and the afterlife" (emphasis added 5). Faiz similarly states that "[Rehana] 'is distressed; she needs her rest. We are thinking only of the children'"(7). These short quotes from the text illustrate Katrak's argument that only certain ways of being woman and mother are accepted in patriarchy. This means that difference, in Rehana's case widowhood, poverty, and distress, make the mother "unfit" to mother her children.

Faiz and the judge are patriarchs because of their judgement and treatment of Rehana; a young widow who has just lost her husband. Both men's words and actions are devoid of any consideration of Rehana's opinions, let alone her feelings about the loss of her husband and the custody of her children. Faiz speaks on behalf of Rehana and describes her feelings about the loss of her husband without showing any genuine interest in actually knowing how she feels about her circumstances. Similarly, the judge seems uninterested in Rehana's view of the situation, he rather asks "what would your husband want?" (5). This denial of the

widowed mother's subjectivity and agency recalls an idea that I discussed in the first chapter of the thesis. The idea is that of the depiction of widowed characters' denial of the right to decide for themselves when it comes to raising their children. This idea of patriarchal desire to manipulate widowed mothers is not found only in *A Golden Age*, but as the analysis in chapter one shows, it is also pertinent to *The Translator* and Salih's *Season*. In the three novels, patriarchs, men and even women, Mahasen in *The Translator*, permit themselves to decide on behalf of the mother figure as if these mothers are no longer capable or, rather trusted, to decide for themselves.

In another passage from *A Golden Age*, the narrator shows that Rehana's mothering does not seem to meet the expectations of patriarchal motherhood, she states:

> [Rehana] had not been able to convince anyone that even though she was poor, and friendless in this town . . . She had not explained to the children where exactly their father had gone, and she had let them stay home from school, and she had taken them to watch *Cleopatra*, but she could still be their mother; she would find a way to overcome her grief, her poverty, her youth; she would find a way to love them all alone. (8)

On the one hand, this example demonstrates the expectations of patriarchal motherhood and its very limited and limiting mode of mothering that it seeks to impose on mothers. On the other hand, it shows how Rehana's character unsettles clichéd representations of the mother as victim of and/or agent of patriarchy that feature in many literary texts. Rehana's reaction to the judge's patriarchal rule is very telling. She might seem to have adhered to the judge and Faiz, and her initial approval of their decision to separate her from the children might be

seen as a sign of victimhood and passivity. However, considering the situation in a broader context where different external aspects are involved, her grief, her lack of experience as a widowed mother, her loneliness, her financial situation, *and* patriarchy, complicate the figure of the mother since Rehana and her motherhood are affected by a number of external factors. This impact of the mother's circumstances on her motherhood recalls my exploration, in chapter one, of the reason behind Sammar's severed relationship with her son being a result of an accumulation of a range of experiences rather than it being related only to patriarchy. This means that both texts consider patriarchy to have a very strong impact on the relationship between the mother and her children, but they complicate these characters' experience of motherhood covering other socioeconomic and even personal experiences as factors that interfere in the mother's relationship with her child(ren). By doing this, Anam attests that motherhood is imbedded in patriarchal expectations, but at the same time, she invites readers to refrain from associating Rehana with other maternal figures of other South Asian texts who are either complicit with patriarchy or are its victims.

In addition to telling a story of a mother from a mother's point of view and in addition to portraying maternal ambivalence in a way that is different from that in daughters' narratives, Anam presents a very complex migrant experience and subjectivity which adds more nuance to the character of the migrant mother. Rehana's experience of mothering as a migrant mother with an unstable and uncertain sense of belonging unsettles the construction of mothers as "bearers" of culture and tradition which features both in daughters' narratives (migrant or not), and in patriarchal and nationalist discourses. The intricacies of migrant motherhood are overlooked both in male nationalist writing and in daughters' representations of motherhood. Migrant identities in general are overlooked in nationalist mainstream narratives since they seem to threaten the unified stable nationalist identity that mainstream nationalist discourses promote. This mean that the migrant mother who often has a shifting

sense of belonging does not fit within the male nationalist construction of the mother as an origin and as a carrier of nationalist traditions and identities.

A Golden Age traces Rehana's quest for belonging and her journey towards achieving a migrant subjectivity. Her journey as a migrant woman searching for a sense of "home" is far from being unchallenging. Rehana's allegiance appears to be divided between three places–which once were unified–West Pakistan, Calcutta, and East Pakistan. What makes Rehana's migrant identity even more complex is the fact that these places to which she is affiliated are in conflict. To understand the kind of relationship that Rehana has with her past and her Bihari origin, one can look at her relationship with her sisters. The analogy that the writer creates between Rehana's past and her sisters is made clear when Rehana begins a letter, which she never sends, to her sisters as follows: "[w]e are on different sides now. I am making pickles for the war effort. You see how much I belong here and not to you" (104). Saying that she does not belong to her sister anymore signals the text's association between Rehana and her sisters and her origin. With this in mind, the following quote becomes especially expressive: "there wasn't a day that went by that Rehana didn't think of them, out there in the sprawling, parched western wing of their country. She held them to her by a loose bit of feeling, not fully connected, not entirely severed" (19). This quote suggests that Rehana's origin as a Bihari is important, but she is not extremely attached to it. What remains significant for Rehana in relation to her origin is language, her love for Urdu and its poetry which she even transmits to Sohail. Language is a very important symbol and marker of belonging in the novel. However, since I have already discussed language in relation to nationalist identities earlier, I choose to focus on a different element here. Suffice to say that language acts as a significant marker of belonging in the novel and that Rehana's relationship

with Urdu fluctuates throughout the narrative indicating the level of attachment that she has with West Pakistan and East Pakistan.

The aspect that I examine here is Rehana's visit of Calcutta is her place of origin. Her visit is very crucial to the understanding of her migrant identity. It can be considered a turning point in Rehana's search for a sense of "home". This is because it is only when she arrives in Calcutta that Rehana comes to terms with her past and with refugees which intensifies her sense of uncertainty. After two decades of absence and distance from Calcutta, once there, Rehana avoids looking at the faces of refugees that she meets in the refugee camp where Maya is volunteering. Rehana is afraid of belonging to the refugee which would mean she is part of Bangladesh, and she is at the same time afraid of not belonging to them which means she would not belong to Bangladesh which would confirm that she is not a nationalist, the narrator states, "Rehana found she could not bear to look at them; she was afraid she would see herself; she was afraid she wouldn't see herself; she wanted to be different and the same as them all at once, neither option offering her relief from the rasping feeling of loss" (206). This dilemma regarding her sense of belonging complicates the representation of the migrant "Third World" mother who has a predetermined identity which is fixed and unchanging regardless of her location. I discussed in more detail this stereotypical image of the mother in the thesis introduction using texts like Nadeem Aslam's *Maps* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and in chapter one when addressing Arab/Muslim representation of mothers.

The pages that follow the scene of Rehana's arrival in Calcutta trace Rehana's movement from loss and uncertainty to having a clear sense of belonging. When Maya's colleague drives Rehana in the streets of Calcutta towards her daughter's office, the narrator explains, "[s]he fixed her eyes on her lap and resisted the temptation to look at her old home. I have not returned to Calcutta, she told herself, I have not returned to Calcutta". Then, once

in the refugee camp, "she knew it was childish to indulge in feeling homesick . . . she hadn't bargained on feeling so *lost*" (emphasis in original 220). Despite these feelings of perplexity, fear, and discomfort that Rehana feels because of her visit to Calcutta to the point that she thought "[s]he shouldn't have come" (220), this visit is essential. The importance of this visit evokes Roberta Rubenstein's discussion of the impact that visiting one's place of origin has on migrant character's relationship with "home". She asserts that: "[n]arratives that engage notions of home, loss, and/or nostalgia confront the past in order to 'fix' it", this "fixing" she explains is, "a process that may be understood in two complementary figurative senses. To 'fix' something is to *secure* it more firmly in the imagination and also to *correct*–as in *revise* or *repair*–it" (Rubenstein 6). Looking at Rehana's experience in Calcutta and the changes that she then experiences in light of Rubenstein's insights, one concludes that Rehana's visit to Calcutta is a process of revision and reparation of her relationship with her past and her place of origin.

After some time in Calcutta and after facing her fears of (un)belonging, Rehana decides to go the refugee camp with Maya telling her: "perhaps it is a good idea . . . There must be some reason why I came here" (228). This means that over time, Rehana's uneasiness started fading away and her attitude started changing until she develops a clear and more certain sense of belonging to Bangladesh, calling it "Home". When Sohail tells her that they are finally going back home, the narrator says, "Home. She [Rehana] wanted to throw her hands in the air and send up a cheer." (236). It is, however, worth noting that despite Rehana's development of sense of Bangladeshi nationalism, her love for Urdu poetry continues. This can be read as a sign of some kind of affiliation with Pakistan which, as I mentioned in this chapter's introduction, echoes Anam's own relationship with Bangladesh which she describes as "a long-distance love affair". The complex journey of Rehana claiming a migrant subjectivity where the significance of "home" fluctuates until it finally

culminates with her realisation that the place where she feels at home is Bangladesh challenges stereotypical imaginations of "Third World", Muslim, and migrant mothers and women's identities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that *A Golden Age* as a text written by a woman writer and centred on a mother and her family's experience of war reclaims the lost and silenced voice of women and particularly mothers in nationalist literary narratives. The chapter demonstrated Anam's negotiation of prominent tropes in relation to women which are fundamental to patriarchal constructions of the nation and nationalist identities. I focused in my analysis of Anam's novel on the examination of how her protagonist engages with tropes, mainly the metaphorisation of women, and domesticity, which are often considered sources of women's oppression, in ways that are not necessarily limited to resistance. Rehana features as both a metaphoric mother figure and a "real" mother. This means that instead of rejecting the allegorisation of women through eschewing the image of the women/mother as a metaphor of the nation, the text adopts this trope. However, what makes the text's "adoption" of this trope remarkable is the writer's use of what Boehmer terms "ironisation" and "literalisation". By doing so, Rehana does not appear as a mere symbol, and her complex unstable nationalism unsettles the patriarchal association of mother figures with origin and preservation of culture and tradition which prevails in masculinist writing of the nation. Anam deals with the depiction of domesticity in a way that is similar to that of the representation of the metaphoric mother. She represents the domestic in a nuanced way where her character embraces it but rejects the passivity and the apolitical nature which are usually attributed to it. The novel portrays domestic spaces as arenas of power rather than

oppression. Anam blurs the harsh line that divides the public and domestic spheres by, for instance, giving value to what seems like mundane domestic activities like cooking and sewing. What makes the representation of both tropes unique is the fact that embracing them expands the meaning of agency and subjectivity beyond the politics of resistance and beyond women's rejection of the domestic in favour of public spaces. Rehana appears to be satisfied with her perception as the mother of the nation and with being a symbol of the nation, and her everyday life which is in broad terms domestic is not at all boring or limiting. This means that through negotiating these tropes, between accepting, unsettling, and resisting different aspects related to them, the writer offers readers a different sense of subjectivity which encompasses "inhabiting" aspects of women's lives that are usually associated with their oppression.

Similarly, the study of Rehana as a "real" migrant character reveals that Rehana's agency and subjectivity are not acquired through solely rejecting the "ideals" of "normative" motherhood but rather by engaging with them in a nuanced manner. Representing patriarchy in relation to the construction of motherhood and rejecting it did not inhibit Anam from reclaiming the importance of aspects of motherhood that have come to be associated with patriarchal motherhood such as maternal love, devotion, and care. The novel constructs an image of migrant mothering that combines aspects of "normative", and "non-normative" motherhood which results in a complex model of maternal subjectivity. This complex maternal subjectivity adds nuance to the often simplistic representations of migrant mothers in literary texts narrated from a daughter's point of view where mothers are often portrayed as victims or agents of patriarchy. A recurrent feature in the portrayal of migrant mothers from a daughter's point of view is the mother's role as preserver of the country of origin's traditions (often associated with backwardness). Anam complicates this motif by delineating Rehana's search for "home" as anything but a straightforward trajectory. Rehana's

fluctuating sense of belonging unsettles clichéd construction of migrant mothers as maintainers of tradition whose identities are immune to change.

Conclusion

In this study, I argued that *The Translator*, *One Hundred Shades of White*, and *A Golden Age* are novels that offer nuanced portrayals of migrant motherhood. These texts reclaim the silenced and overlooked maternal voice. Bringing migrant mothers' stories and voices to the fore, these three narratives "write back" and/or add nuance to simplistic accounts about motherhood, mothers, and more specifically, they problematise the stereotypical representations of "Third World" women/mothers and "Third World" migrant women/mothers. As it has been argued in the previous chapters, that in discourses which circulate within the media, and in political, literary and even feminist spheres, "Third World" migrant mothers, and "Third World" women and mothers in general are often depicted as victims of patriarchy, oppressed and even backwards. In negative depictions of "Third World" women, "Third World" cultures, traditions, communities, and families are often thought of as being the source of women and mothers' backwardness, oppression, and victimhood. This link between women's oppression and "Third World" traditions might be seen as the reason why many women writers of "Third World" heritage depict both "Third World" traditions and mothers negatively. Characters in texts by writers like Nina Bouraoui, Najat El Hachmi, Laila Halaby, and Monica Ali, usually have a strong desire to disavow both the country of origin along with its culture and traditions, as well as their mothers. These characters reject their mothers, and in some cases, they reject motherhood altogether because the "Third World" mother becomes confounded with patriarchy, featuring as its victim or agent. The maternal character is thus at the heart of representations of "Third World" women's subordination by inherently patriarchal "Third World" cultures and traditions. In my thesis, I have argued that by portraying "Third World" communities and their traditions simplistically as essentially "woman-hating", writers end up employing what Geoffrey Nash

labels "recycled Orientalist tropes" (26), even if their intention might be to show that women of "Third World" heritage can resist patriarchal oppression. Many of these texts that depict the "Third World" and its women/mothers stereotypically in very negative light are migrant literary narratives. They often trace a protagonist's journey towards self-realisation. In this study, I have demonstrated that in many of these narratives, subjectivity and agency cannot be achieved in "Third World" countries which means migration to the West becomes the gateway towards the protagonists' pursuit of subjectivity and agency. A lot of the time in these texts, there is a contrast between the life of misery and oppression of women/mothers in the "Third World" and the life of power and agency in the West.

Throughout the thesis, I uncovered an association between the negative depiction of mothers and the loss of the maternal voice. Since "fictional narratives about mothers have traditionally been told from the child's (predominantly the daughter's) point of view, if told at all" (Williams 133), reclaiming the mother's voice allows for, in Hirsch's terms, the expression of mothers' "power and powerlessness, authority and invisibility, strength and vulnerability, anger and love" (Hirsch 167). Because patriarchal motherhood limits motherhood to the idealised image of the mother who is married, heterosexual, all-the-time loving, caring, and able, what Rich calls "the blissful gratification and tenderness" risks being associated or confounded with patriarchal motherhood. In literature, complex maternal figures that challenge simplistic and patriarchal constructions of motherhood are to be found in "[t]hat kind of writing [that] simultaneously reveals the pros and cons of mothering, and the manifold interests mothers possess beyond her [*sic*] role" (Hiebert 11-2). My study

reveals the complex nature of matrifocal narratives which represent motherhood as it is lived and narrated by mother figures.

The novels that I selected for this study counter patriarchal expectations but at the same time celebrate what has come to be identified as "ideals" of "normative" motherhood–often read as patriarchal motherhood–such as love, care, nurture, and devotion. The novels present these "ideals" as sources of power rather than oppression by problematising them and disentangling them from patriarchal associations and expectations. A major common characteristic between the three texts under study is the fact that they problematise the representation of both the experience of "Third World" women's maternal and migrant subjectivities. The three main maternal figures that are at the centre of my analysis subvert the stereotypical image of the passive and oppressed migrant mother. They also challenge the idea that "Third World" migrant women/mothers' agency and subjectivity are cultivated through abandoning norms of their cultures of origin/heritage in favour of Western ones. Migrant subjectivities that are presented in the three novels are developed through negotiations of different cultures and norms of both societies.

The Translator is approached as a text that "writes back" to stereotypical constructions of Arab/Muslim women's identities and subjectivities. In my analysis of *The Translator*, I focused on the ways in which Aboulela highly problematises the representation of a migrant woman's experience of motherhood and migration. I examined the novel's subversion of the stereotype of the passive and oppressed Arab/Muslim woman whose assertion of agency is conditioned by the disavowal of her country of origin's culture and traditions. I analysed *The Translator* against what Mohja Kahf's labels "the Victim-Escapee stereotype" which consists of a number of elements that characterise timeworn representations of Arab/Muslim women as either victims or escapees from their native

patriarchal culture. To do this, I examined of the novel's representation of the meaning of home which is illustrated in Sammar's complicated journey of searching for a sense of belonging. I investigated Sammar's fluctuating sense of belonging to a place which she can call "home" using Roberta Rubenstein's distinction between homesickness which she defines as longing for a particular geographical space, and nostalgia which is rather longing for a specific time in the migrant character's past (4). The complex relationship that Sammar has with Sudan and the love that she continues to maintain for her country of heritage challenges the cliché of the migrant character severance of ties with the home country as the route towards achieving agency and subjectivity. Even though the meaning of home for Sammar is not stable and it changes from being an attachment to a geographical location to actually being in love, Sudan continues to be a place to which Sammar is very attached, a place that she loves, and a place that she does not want to be separated from (198). Sammar's attachment to Sudan indicates the text's balanced depiction of this "Third World" country. I argued that this balanced representation of Sudan is realised not only through Aboulela's subversion of stereotypes about the Arab/Muslim countries or the "Third World" as a whole, but also through the writer's acknowledgement of the existence of patriarchy. I highlighted the text's portrayal of patriarchal ideologies through addressing its representation of patriarchal societal expectations about mothers and widows mainly through examining Sammar's relationship with her mother-in-law Mahasen. I also argued that Britain is equally problematised through the depiction of Sammar's feelings of alienation and experience of racism. By presenting both geographical spaces, Sudan and Scotland, in a nuanced way the text undermines the simplistic binarism that often characterises the construction of the East as a space of women's oppression and lack of agency, and the West as a space of liberation and empowerment. The text shows that a character's feeling of being at home, agency, and

fulfilment is not conditioned by being in a particular location, but that it is actually affected by a number of factors and elements such as grief, alienation, absence of love, and patriarchy.

In this chapter I have argued that Sammar's migrant identity, which is complicated by her changing sense of belonging, is further problematised by her status of transnational mothering. Being a transnational mother adds nuance not only to Sammar's migrant identity but also to the image of the Arab/Muslim and "Third World" mother. I approached Sammar's transnationalism–which comes as a reaction to Sammar's conflict with Mahasen–as an act of rebellion against patriarchal expectations on mothers and widows. Sammar's subversion of patriarchal control unsettles the passivity and lack of agency that are associated with Arab/Muslim women. I also asserted that Mahasen's denial of Sammar's self-fulfilment is one of the factors that affected Sammar's relationship with her son and led to her separation from him. This means that *The Translator* rejects the ideology of patriarchal motherhood which does not acknowledge mothers' personal desire and expects them to be fulfilled by being entirely devoted to their children. Motherhood, like the experience of migration, is highly problematised by the text's depiction of different factors that disturb or complicate this experience. Sammar's experience of motherhood is affected by maternal ambivalence, grief, racism, and patriarchy, and love. This complex perception of motherhood contributes to the representation of motherhood in general and to the representation of "Third World" motherhood which is usually seen through very limited lens.

The last point that I addressed in chapter one is the representation of Sammar's quest of self-fulfilment. This quest though, which is stereotypically thought to be realised only through breaking away from "ideals" of womanhood, is in this novel realised through Sammar's "inhabitance" of the very norms that might be seen as sources of women's oppression. Sammar's insistence on getting married is read as a sign of regression by critics like Waïl Hasan. I, however, interpreted Sammar's desire to get married as an act of rebellion

against patriarchal expectations and as act of asserting her own agency. Furthermore, Sammar's insistence on complying with Islam's regulation of sexual relationships and her insistence on Rae's conversion to Islam in order to be able to get married to him is an act of asserting agency rather than a sign of lack of agency.

The analysis of *One Hundred Shades of White* in chapter two focuses on examining the text's representation of the migratory journey of Nalini and on her experience of motherhood. As in the study of *The Translator*, in this chapter I focused on *One Hundred*'s problematisation of the representation of a mother figure's migrant and maternal subjectivities against stereotypical constructions of "Third World" migrant mothers usually imbedded in a rhetoric of victimisation and oppression. The ways in which Nair complicates the portrayal of the migrant "Third World" woman and mother overlap in many ways with those implemented by Aboulela. The parallel between both texts lies in both writers' creation of female characters who manifest complicated relationships and perceptions of the country of origin/heritage and Britain. While Sammar's relationship with Sudan is revised after her visit to the country without her lover Tarig, Nalini's migrant subjectivity and identity are reconstructed through her experimentation with fusion of food, a cultural element which she inherits from her mother. Nalini's sense of home during the early days of her stay in England is comparable to that of Sammar; India was the only home for Nalini. However, her sense of belonging starts to gradually be reshaped as a result of her experimentation with mixing culinary practices from both India and Britain. Presenting characters with a changing sense of belonging does not necessarily entail characters' dismissal of the importance of the country of origin/heritage or its culture and tradition. Both texts' portrayal of female migrant subjectivities and identities departs from the plot of assimilation where the character exchanges her culture of heritage for that of the West in order to achieve a new sense of identity and agency. This leads us to the other similarity to note between Aboulela's and

Nair's narratives which is the texts' nuanced engagement with what might be considered "traditional ideals" of motherhood and womanhood often associated with women's subjugation. While for Sammar, as noted above, it is her adherence to Islam's rules regarding sexual relationships and her consideration of marriage as a source of fulfilment that appear as signs of agency. For Nalini, it is her devotion, care, love, self-sacrifice, and her embrace of the domestic–symbolised in the kitchen–that might be misread as signs of backwardness when in fact they are her sources of subjectivity and empowerment. In this chapter, I addressed *One Hundred*'s complication and celebration of these "ideals" that have often acquired negative significance in women's writing and scholarship.

I examined the centrality and importance of the kitchen, and by extension food and cooking, in the novel as an act of subversion to the usual simplistic terms in which they are represented. Instead of being perceived as mundane, passive, or even indicative of women's oppression, the kitchen is presented as a space of women's power and solidarity, and food and cooking are portrayed as cultural markers and as symbols of the conflict and reconciliation between Nalini and her children. To analyse this central theme which is the link between food and mother-child conflict and reconciliation, I applied Homi Bhabha's concepts of "mimicry" and "hybridity". I argued that the "Anglicized" colonial subject which the British colonial rule wanted to make "almost" British "but not quite" is comparable to the type of food that Nalini cooks by mixing Indian and British culinary practices in order to mediate her children's growing sense of "Britishness". The complex manner in which the kitchen, food, and cooking are portrayed serves to blur the boundaries between domestic and public spheres, and to privilege Nalini's relationship with her past in India that is symbolised

in this female heritage transmitted to her from her mother and which she then transmits to her own daughters.

My study of the importance of female ancestral heritage was not restricted to highlighting its importance in the construction of Nalini's migrant identity and subjectivity but also in adding nuance to the representation of Nalini's experience of motherhood. As in Aboulela's text, motherhood in Nair's narrative is neither idealised nor vilified. Matrilineal heritage and relationships complicate the image of the mother given the central role that matrilineal bonds play in assisting Nalini in her mothering in times of weakness and despair. In this chapter, Nalini is presented as a mother who feels weak and needs assistance in her mothering. My analysis indicates that *One Hundred* represents a rather ordinary or a lived experience of motherhood which challenges the idealisation of motherhood without entirely rejecting it. Matrilineal relationships are not valued only thematically in *One Hundred*, the dual narrative voice of the text is another technique used by Nair to emphasise the importance of bringing women's voices to the fore to challenge simplistic and Orientalist accounts about Indian women. In this duality, restoring the mother's voice reclaims the story of the mother which was lost to the daughter's narrative point of view and to simplistic and patriarchal imaginations of "Third World" motherhood and mothers.

Patriarchal imaginations of "Third World" motherhood and mothers are at the heart of the analysis of *A Golden Age* in chapter three. Being a text about a mother and her children's survival of the Liberation War of 1971, which resulted in the establishment of Bangladesh as a separate nation from Pakistan, *A Golden Age* brings to the forefront a story that would have easily been overlooked in patriarchal accounts of war and nationalism. My study of *A Golden Age* focused on the examination of the text's representation of the mother as nation and of the mother in the nation–tropes that have dominated patriarchal imaginations of the nation–from

a maternal point of view. In my close reading of Anam's text, I extensively draw insights from Elleke Boehmer's *Stories of Women* which is a comprehensive study of the representation of women/mothers in nationalist discourses by male and female writers and scholars. The main point of my discussion of Anam's representation of the figure of the mother in relation to patriarchal imaginations is the idea of the text's complex engagement with the figure of the metaphoric mother and the trope of domesticity. I do not argue that the text resists a patriarchal paradigm because the argument that I put forward is that resistance is only one way whereby women writers, among them Anam, choose to present "Third World" female characters who have a strong sense of agency and subjectivity. I relied on what Boehmer calls "literalising" and "ironising" the metaphorisation of the maternal body and the mother figure to understand *A Golden Age*'s depiction of metaphoric motherhood. In negotiating a sense of nationalism, Rehana embraces aspects of the mother as nation which usually characterise male masculinist writing of the nation; she is content being the mother of revolutionaries and she happily embraces the changes that occur to her body which make her stand for the newly created nation, this "acceptance" however is not straightforward. In negotiating these tropes that are associated with patriarchal representations of mothers in nationalist discourses, Rehana accepts some aspects, rejects others (like the asexuality or chastity of the maternal body), and performs others differently (like her embrace of the domestic as a creative and political space).

By engaging in a complex manner with these tropes and norms of nationalism, Anam reveals that women's agency can take many forms one of which is resistance. This nuanced perception of agency problematises the very idea of women's oppression and backwardness. Rehana's embrace of domesticity and nurturing roles present these "ideals" as empowering rather than subjugating which recalls Mahmood's idea in *Politics of Piety* that what might seem to be a sign of oppression may well be an indication of agency (15). As in the previous

chapters, the mother figure's relationship with norms is a very crucial point of discussion since as I have explained in all the previous chapters, mothers are often perceived and portrayed as symbols and carriers of traditions. By presenting this story from Rehana's point of view, Anam challenges the absence of mothers' narratives from discourses of nationalism and rescues the mother figure from the purely figurative position that she has previously occupied. Regarding the absence of the maternal perspective in narratives of nationalism, one of the most striking details in Boehmer's study and which is one of the most fundamental points of my discussion of *A Golden Age* is the fact that even when nationalism is narrated by women's voices, often it is dominated by the voice of daughters and not mothers (19-20).

Another equally important focus of my study of *A Golden Age*, in addition to the examination of Rehana as a metaphorical figure, was to address its contribution to the burgeoning body of literature that is concerned with the representation of motherhood as a lived experience. Such a representation values the day-to-day lives and practices of mothers challenging the idealisation and metaphorisation of motherhood which most often deny mothers their subjectivity. In her representation of a concrete experience of motherhood, Anam portrays a complex mother figure who embodies aspects of "normative" motherhood such as care, devotion, and self-sacrifice, and "non-normative" aspects of motherhood such as maternal ambivalence and sexual desire and experimentation. The novel's focus on the portrayal of the ordinary and concrete experience of motherhood is one of the shared foci between the three novels that this thesis examines–in addition to their reclamation of the maternal voice and their problematisation of migrant mothers' identities and subjectivities. I argued that Rehana's nuanced story of migration narrated from her own point of view stands in opposition to the stereotypical story of the migrant mother that is usually told from migrant children's perspective where the mother has a fixed identity and where she embodies the backwardness of her "Third World" culture. The complexity of Rehana's migration

experience is manifested in her uncertain sense of belonging which reaches its climax when she is forced to leave Dhaka and to visit her place of origin Calcutta after decades of separation. This suggests that *A Golden Age* representation of the mother figure's migrant identity and subjectivity is in line with that of the other two novels under study. The three novels emphasise the complex nature of the mother character's migrant identity which departs from the usual migrant novel's plot where the mother is either an embodiment of backwardness because of her attachment to the country of origin and its patriarchal culture, or where she completely severs herself from any association with her country of origin to achieve a strong migrant identity and subjectivity.

To sum up, my research in this thesis has set out to investigate *The Translator*, *One Hundred Shades of White*, and *A Golden Age*'s representation of complex experiences of motherhood, migration, and motherhood in migration. The analysis of the individual texts reveals that Aboulela, Nair, and Anam rely on problematising their characters' migrant identities and mothering modes to counter simplistic narratives of victimisation. The mother characters' complex negotiation of the "traditional ideals" of motherhood and womanhood challenges "Third World" cultures and traditions' association with patriarchy and backwardness. This complex negotiation of norms also problematises the character of the "Third World" migrant woman whose migrant subjectivity and agency do not compel her to overthrow her ethnic heritage. Rather than being victims of their ethnic culture's patriarchy, Sammar, Nalini, and Rehana cultivate a strong sense of subjectivity and agency as a result of embracing many aspects of their "Third World" culture, traditions, and norms.

My study of motherhood is in line with the scholarship that addresses the different meanings and manifestations of motherhood. However, despite the common interest between my study and other works–which is to highlight the complexity of motherhood and to present

it as an empowering experience–my study differs from many other studies on motherhood. While many feminist studies of motherhood tend to focus on negative aspects of motherhood such as rejection, aggression, hate, anger and infanticide, my work emphasises the importance of presenting a “well-balanced” view of motherhood. This means that my work does not restrict empowering motherhood to acts of transgression, it rather highlights the importance of negative as well as positive aspects of motherhood like love, care, nurture, and devotion challenging the association of the latter facets of motherhood with patriarchy.

Finally, I would like to conclude my study by emphasising the importance of giving more attention to works that feature complex modes of mothering that are not confined to “non-normative” acts. More research is required on works that present mother figures that negotiate between “non-normative” and what is often described as “ideals of traditional” motherhood. It is also crucial in the study of texts that are counter narratives to simplistic portrayals of “Third World” women to consider works that hold a “well-balanced” view on the “Third World” which unsettle what Chimamanda Nguzi Adichi calls “the single story”. Such a complex view of the “Third World” and of “Third World” communities and their traditions can be summarised in a statement made by British Muslim Pakistani writer–as she prefers to be called–Qaisra Shahraz in an online event where she says: “I speak strongly about patriarchy but never stereotype my community” (Shahraz).

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