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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Female Resistance and Discourses of Power:  
Sonallah Ibrahim and Sue Monk Kidd**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Comparative Literature

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By

**Ragia Mostafa Abdel Hamid**

Under the supervision of **Dr. Tahia Abdel Nasser**

**March/ 2017**

The American University in Cairo

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Has been approved by

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## Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of the relationship between knowledge and power in modern society. It provides an analysis of the different ways in which the Egyptian writer Sonallah Ibrahim and the American writer Sue Monk Kidd depict the effect of knowledge discourses on power relations in their works. Therefore, the thesis is interconnected with Michel Foucault's theory on knowledge and power and their effect on the individual in modern society. Lily and Zaat, the main female characters in *The Secret Life of Bees* and *Zaat* are both exposed to different power discourses by the social institutions in their society. Despite its focus on the two characters, the study also examines the effect of the social institutions on other female characters in the two works. In both novels, the characters attempt to challenge the effect of these discourses on their lives through different resistance mechanisms. While the characters of Sonallah Ibrahim's novel fail in countering the effects of power discourses in Egyptian society, the characters of Sue Monk Kidd's novel succeed in their resistance. The study also examines the effect of political, historical, religious and social reality on the authors' choice of their female characters' fate. Hence, the thesis becomes a study on the effects of the discourses of the power institutions in society on both the writers and their fictional characters.

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## Introduction

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault examines the relationship between the individual and the relations of power in society: “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (202). Primarily, Foucault’s theory is concerned with the micro-level social relations, or the relationships which dictate the behavior of individuals in society. In other words, his theory attempts to answer questions such as what alters people’s behavior, what motivates them, and what hinders them from conforming to society’s standards. In an attempt to answer these questions, Foucault argues that individuals, since birth, become integrated into society through a system of knowledge and power relations, which controls their social interactions and dictates their self-perception. In his theory, Foucault challenges the conventional notion of power as physical force, arguing that power is a product of social relations between individuals and is not something that is directly enforced on people from above by a specific institution:

The exercise of power is not violence, nor consent, but a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. (“The subject and Power” 789)

On the other hand, the discourses of knowledge which are reflected in the media as well as medical, religious, and social institutions of the state have the power to determine the accepted or normal behavior of individuals in society. Given the pervasive nature of such discourses and their permeation of relations in society, power is transformed from one that is enforced by force or violence into a subtle “machine that no one owns” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 156). This subtlety of power relations leads individuals to perceive their actions as acts of free will while in fact they are made in compliance with power.

This thesis focuses on contemporary novels by Egyptian Writer Sonallah Ibrahim and American Writer Sue Monk Kidd. In both novels, the female characters are manifestations of Foucault’s theory on the relationship between power, knowledge, and subjectivity in modern societies. In Sue Monk Kidd’s novel *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily, the protagonist, her maid, Rosaleen and the three beekeeping sisters, May, June and August, face dominant power relations, which affect their behavior and perception of life. Lily faces a patriarchal family and an abusive father and Rosaleen faces a racial community which attempts to prevent her from practicing her legal right to vote. The three bee-keeping sisters May, June and August, confront racial and gender oppression at one point of their lives. In Sonallah Ibrahim’s novel *Zaat*, the female characters also face dominant power relations which affect their social behavior and self-perception. The main female protagonist Zaat confronts a patriarchal family, a judgemental workplace, a patriarchal religious institution and a critical economic situation. Similarly, Samiha, Zaat’s neighbor, faces an abusive husband and a patriarchal society and family which take the side of her husband. Safiya, Zaat’s best friend, suffers from the political corruption in her society. Foucault proposes that when power relations infiltrate social networks in society, they produce different types of relations such as knowledge and power, economic practices, and



sexual relations (*History of Sexuality* 94). Therefore, the power relations in the two novels affect the female characters and their aspirations. Aspects such as the level of education, the standards of femininity and womanhood, and career choices of the female characters are affected by the power relations of their society. This leads the female characters of the novel to lose control over such aspects while, at the same time, they attempt to resist them. Thus, the female characters of each novel employ entrepreneurship, sisterhood, dreams, agency, religion, and confrontation as strategies of resistance to the dominant discourses of power in their lives.

Foucault also proposes that the subtle effect of power/knowledge relations has the capability of infiltrating multiple institutions in society such as schools, hospitals, the military, and the workplace. The pervasiveness results in the production of a “subjected” or “docile” human body that is easier to control and can be manipulated by others (*Discipline and Punish* 138). In order to comply with the power discourses in their surrounding institution, individuals attempt to discipline themselves to follow the regulations of their society. On the other hand, individuals who resist these regulations become labeled as dangerous citizens who require isolation or punishment. Foucault perceives this system of power/knowledge relations as a Panopticon prison system. In *Power/knowledge*, he describes it as follows:

A perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the centre of this, a tower, pierced by large windows opening on to the inner face of the ring. The outer building is divided into cells each of which traverses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows, one opening on to the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. All that is then needed

is to put an overseer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy. (147)

In this system, the gaze of the Panopticon central tower ensures that power is not directly linked to an individual who owns or exercises it and the perpetual visibility of the central tower as a structure, combined with the constant visibility of the inmates, ensures their adherence to the prison regulations. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the overall function of the Panopticon in controlling the behavior of the inmates:

The Panopticon functions as a kind of laboratory of power. Thanks to its mechanisms of observation, it gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate into men's behavior; knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of knowledge over all the surfaces on which power is exercised. (204)

Foucault believes that there is a direct link between knowledge and power relations. He sees knowledge and power as notions which support and reinforce the existence of each other (*Discipline and Punish* 224). For example, the religious, economic, gender, and psychological discourses in society constitute a certain image of the normal and good individual. This particular image of normality leads individuals to aspire to become this certain image by both implementing self-discipline and oppressing the individuals who do not conform to such images. In this way, discourses define the operation of the power of the medical, religious, economic, and family institutions and legitimize their operation (Phelan 424). Therefore, Foucault does not see power as a system of domination by a specific group (*The History of Sexuality* 92). Instead, he

views power as deeply rooted in the layers of the social relations of society and a product of the interaction between its individuals (“The subject and Power” 792). However, power is not the only entity which exists within the social layers of society; resistance exists there as well.

According to Foucault, where there is power, there is resistance which is always inside power and cannot escape it (*History of Sexuality* 95). Resistance operates in social relations in the same way as power relations by infiltrating the layers of society.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes the pervasive nature of resistance when he notes that “just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities” (96). Resistance to power relations can take multiple forms. For example, an individual or a group can resist the dominant power relations in their society through the manipulation of the discourses of power which enforce and define such relations. Foucault argues that in addition to the role played by discourses in supporting power, they can also undermine it by creating a “reverse discourse” (*The History of Sexuality* 101). In modern times, state institutions regulate power relations which dictate the normal behavior of individuals in society; therefore, the need for resistance emerges in order to counter the effect of this institutionalization of power relations.

Feminist theorists share with Foucault the recognition of the human body as a site of power relations (Balides 138). Carolyn Ells summarizes this relationship when she argues that “while feminists respond with great concern to the various forms and depths power has in relationships, Foucault’s analysis formally identifies power with those relationships” (226). Therefore, through the examination of power relations in the novels of Sonallah Ibrahim and Sue Monk Kidd, we can have a better understanding of gender roles in the societies of the female

characters. On the other hand, feminist theorists argue that power relations in society lead women to view themselves as an object for heterosexual men to pursue (Ells 220). Therefore, the female characters Zaat and Lily in both novels are perfect exemplars of the effect of power relations and gender discourses on female subjectivity in modern society. The gaze of their community and the discourses of their social institutions construct their perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of the world. As such, the institution of gender is viewed by feminists in terms of power relations, which govern individuals and their perception of gender and sexuality (Hekman 84). Through the lens of Foucault's knowledge and power theory, gender roles in the two novels can be examined as a social construct which governs the feminine behavior of the female characters. In other words, the study of power discourses in *Zaat* and *The Secret Life of Bees* produces a deeper understanding of patriarchal institutions and their control of gender roles in society.

Foucault also argues that the desired effect of the Panopticon gaze is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic function of power (*Discipline and Punish* 201). In the novels, the representatives of the dominant power relations transform themselves into a gaze which monitors the behavior of the female characters and induces acts of internalization and self-discipline which enforce their subordination to power. The individuals discipline themselves and each other without the use of force because they are constantly aware that there is a "visible" and "unverifiable" entity which is always observing them (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201). In the novels, the figures of the husband, the father, the religious official, and the policeman discipline themselves and the individuals around them according to the regulations of the dominant racial, patriarchal, gender, and economic power relations in their society. These different forms of discipline are a direct result of the prolonged

effect of religious, racial, patriarchal, and economic discourses disseminated through media or social relations. Through discourses of power, knowledge spreads among individuals in society and dictates their social behavior. The political, economic, religious, educational, and medical institutions disseminate these discourses in society and form the connection between knowledge and power. For instance, gossip plays an integral role in both novels as a discourse which affects the behavior of the female characters. The news in different media outlets such as newspapers, TV or the radio in the novels affects the female characters as well. Nevertheless, despite the Panopticon system surrounding the female characters, the desire to resist dominant discourses emerges and the female characters use different methods to partly or fully subvert the hegemonic patriarchal, religious, economic, and racial power relations. Female characters use counter discourses, acts of agency, entrepreneurship skills, sisterhood, and dreams to counter the effect of power. Foucault argues that an examination of the forms of resistance in society can make power relations more pellucid (“The Subject and Power” 780). Therefore, a study of the different forms of resistance in the novel introduces the reader to the various forms of power, which embed gender roles in society.

The two contemporary literary works incorporate an analogous sense of attachment to the historical and political realities of their countries of origin. For example, Sonallah Ibrahim builds the fictional life of his characters against a background of the political reality of Egypt from the Nasser era to Mubarak’s rule and connects the fictional narrative with this reality through newspaper clippings and quotes. Similarly, Sue Monk Kidd draws the life of her fictional characters against the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement in the US. She establishes this link through news segments from newspapers, TV, and the radio as well. The two novels also highlight the role of state institutions in the social lives of the characters. For instance, the

institutions of family, religion, marriage, and law affect the behavior and self- perception of the female characters. The female characters of both novels set out on personal journeys of resistance. Moreover, each female character in both novels faces a different form of gender, racial, or social oppression in her community. However, each female character enjoys an amount of freedom which enables her to perform acts of resistance against the dominant discourses of power in her society. Therefore, the two novels illustrate the acts of agency and resistance of the female characters and the effects of historical, political, religious, patriarchal, and economic conditions on their growth.

The thesis will explore the discourses of power within the political and social backgrounds of both Egypt and the United States and their effect on the female characters in the two novels *Zaat* and *The Secret Life of Bees*. I will also analyze the different types of power discourses and the role of family, religion, law, media, and race in the novels. Furthermore, I will highlight the resistance of female characters to dominant discourses of power in their society. I will then compare the different forms of resistance of the female characters in the two novels. The goal of my thesis will be to explore the effects of the socio-cultural and political reality on the female characters' relationships and subjectivity in the two novels.

## Chapter 1:

### Discourses of Power and Female Resistance in Sonallah Ibrahim's *Zaat*

The character of Zaat in Sonallah Ibrahim's novel represents an Egyptian woman who belongs to the middle class and whose life events are traced by the author, starting from her childhood to her adulthood. Zaat is an Arabic name which means "self". In the novel, Ibrahim focuses on Zaat's social relations, her dreams, few successes, disappointments, and failures. When he first started to write *Zaat*, Ibrahim recalls that, originally, he did not intend for his character to turn out the way she did. Instead of being an audacious character who resists life challenges, Zaat turns out to be a diffident one. Ibrahim explains the change which Zaat's character undergoes during the process of writing:

Like everyone else, I was thinking about what was happening in the country and I wanted to give my own testimony. I was hoping I could write a modern myth, with a character that would overcome all the existing deteriorating circumstances. But when I started writing, the situation changed. The character was transformed into a completely crushed one. (Mehrez 130)

Despite the harsh effect of the word "crushed," it provides an accurate description of the effect of the economic, sexual, religious, political, and social burdens on Zaat in the novel. Therefore, Ibrahim's purpose of writing *Zaat* was to highlight those burdens in an attempt to resist them. Samia Mehrez also perceives *Zaat* in this light as she describes it as a novel that does not critique

a particular regime; rather, it is one that critiques the present in all its manifestations – social, economic, cultural, ideological, religious, and political (129). To achieve his goal, Ibrahim uses an unconventional literary technique of newspaper clippings in separate chapters in the novel. Almost every chapter of *Zaat* is followed by a chapter which incorporates newspaper clippings and quotes from a wide range of economic, entertainment, religious, and political news from the same historical period. The purpose of this technique is to connect the events of the novel with the historical, religious, and political background of Egypt at the time. Yoav Di-Capua notes that the newspaper clippings are rendered in a crude, telegraphic, and unanalytical fashion as the data that makes and unmakes Zaat's sense of progressive being in the world (87-88). This documentary representation of the newspaper clippings and quotes displays an abundant amount of corruption, venality, and deterioration in Egyptian society. Coupled with Zaat's personal burdens, the imaginary and documentary forms of the novel unite together around Zaat to form a "Panopticon" system of familial, economic, social, and religious relations that entrap her. Inside this Panopticon, Zaat experiences a range of power relations which alter her conception of self and others.

By examining the different institutions affecting Zaat's life, we can have a better understanding of the discourses of power in the novel. In these discourses, Zaat's subjectivity is governed by her society and the state. Her womanhood becomes both a source of pride and shame and is used by many institutions to enforce conventional gender roles. In the novel, Zaat appears as a diffident and predominantly passive character who conforms to her family and society. Ibrahim shows Zaat's character through her name, which is derived from the name of a courageous Arab female princess named "Zaat El Hemma." To prove his point, Ibrahim omits the second part of the name and leaves Zaat without "Hemma" or zeal and ends up with a



character that is frequently defeated in life, a character who takes solace in crying in defeat in the isolation of her bathroom. Before experiencing this sense of defeat, Zaat performs small acts of resistance in response to the pressure of the dominant power relations in her community. By examining these acts of resistance, the reader can view Zaat's character from a new perspective, one in which she is not only subject to power, but a source of power as well.

The role of the family institution in the subjugation of Zaat starts from childhood. In the first few pages, Ibrahim offers a brief summary of the traumatic moments in Zaat's life. The traumas start from birth with the "first slap on the backside" then the menstrual cycle and finally the tearing of the "protuberance that has so disturbed the Egyptians since ancient times or female genital mutilation" (*Zaat* 2; *Dhat* 7-8). Of several traumatic moments in Zaat's life, Ibrahim opens his novel with Zaat's wedding night. During the wedding night, Abdel Maguid, the groom, discovers that Zaat is not a virgin. Ibrahim describes this traumatic moment:

What had happened was that Abdel Maguid had discovered, or thought he had discovered, that the merchandise upon which he had spent all his savings, and waged his future, was not in perfect condition, and that someone else, maybe even more than one, had handled the contents, or at least the packaging, before him. (*Zaat* 8; *Dhat* 14)

The choice of this defining moment by the author reveals the irony of the situation. The irony reveals itself in the futility of the countless attempts by the family to preserve their daughter's virginity for this exact moment through female circumcision and discipline. In addition, Ibrahim's sarcasm shows in his reference to Zaat as "merchandise" and "packaging" in order to highlight the objectification of Zaat by the institutions of the family and marriage. He reinforces

Zaat's objectification by using words such as "savings" and "contents" to describe Abdel Maguid's perception of his bride (*Zaat* 8; *Dhat* 14). What is more interesting is Zaat's reaction to the situation and her relentless efforts to prove her innocence to her groom. For example, after her own shocking discovery of the truth, Zaat's first instinct is to swear her fidelity to Abdel Maguid on the holy book of the Qur'an. This response reveals the role of disciplinary power of the family institution in influencing Zaat to accept her objectification and adopt the views of the patriarchal system. Diamond and Quinby describe women's acceptance of objectification as an "internalization of patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability" (77). In other words, patriarchal family practices construct "a regime of truth" (Munro 82) which disciplines Zaat into conformity to social ideals such as female virginity. By defining the normal in Zaat's life, the family institution uses an integral instrument of disciplinary power, which is known as normalizing judgment (Ells 215). Through this power, discipline is not performed by a person; instead, it is performed by a social value that is considered normal in society. In Zaat's situation, the social value is female virginity. Despite the value of female virginity in the eyes of the institution of marriage, the family never prepares its members for the shocking discovery of their own sexuality. For instance, Zaat's family never prepares her for the traumatic situations in which she discovers her own sexuality, and moments such as the onset of her menstrual cycle and female circumcision are traumatic. Zaat suffers the effect of those traumatic moments and feels disappointed after discovering that the "thing she had so long struggled to preserve had not been there in the first place" (*Zaat* 8; *Dhat* 15). Zaat's new self-discoveries and the resulting disappointments embed her suffering and female subjection in the novel.

The institution of marriage creates another important moment of subjection for Zaat in the novel. This moment takes place when Abdel Maguid prevents Zaat from continuing her

university education. As Laura Bier explains, the 1950s and 1960s in Egypt saw the fulfillment of many of the demands of post-war feminists, including the right to vote, the right to run for public office, protective legislations of women workers, and the expansion of free public education (55). Therefore, new possibilities awaited Egyptian women in education and the workplace during that period. Zaat, a young member of this generation, had similar aspirations of university education and employment. Ibrahim expresses her optimism during her conversation with Abdel Maguid:

In the days of the duck pond in Merryland Garden, Zaat, who was preparing to take the first-year exam of the Media Faculty for the second time, had announced that she wanted to continue her studies so she could work after graduation for a newspaper, or, if she was lucky, in television. (*Zaat* 9; *Dhat* 15)

The Nasser era held new possibilities for women and the discourses on womanhood reproduced earlier nationalist formulations that made progress in the domestic and public spheres (Bier 179). This Nasser-era dream of modern female employment and domesticity was responsible for the formulation of Zaat's educational and professional aspirations. However, Abdel Maguid shatters these dreams by insisting on Zaat's abandonment of her university education for the sake of marriage. He enforces patriarchal power on Zaat in order to subject her to conventional gender roles in which the man works and the woman remains at home to raise the children. He also uses discourses which stress female domesticity in order to enforce these gender roles. This exchange of power relations between Abdel Maguid and Zaat eventually defeats Zaat. Again, Zaat acquiesces and becomes a housewife. Thus, Zaat comes to accept and adopt the practices that

reflect and reinforce the power of the dominant individual who is Abdel Maguid. Zaat's internalization of these discourses is clearly reflected in the reasons underlying her decision:

Zaat accepted the proposed borders with a certain satisfaction and submitted to the sturdy shelter bestowed upon her, which seemed to her a natural extension of the shelter her father had provided... Nor was Zaat in any hurry to continue her studies since, due to the limited nature of the traditional operation she had undergone in her childhood, she found it extremely difficult to concentrate, and a strange state came over her whenever she read or wrote, in which the words all climbed on top of one another's backs and the phrases and meanings got mixed up. (*Zaat* 9-10; *Dhat* 16)

The main reason behind Zaat's submission is that she envisions the institution of marriage as an extension of the family, or the original patriarchal institution, which provides her with emotional and financial security. She also attributes her reading difficulty to her female circumcision instead of dyslexia. Her surrender to the patriarchal practices of both her parents and Abdel Maguid highlights what Foucault describes as the effects of the subtle and meticulous control of the power relations within the patriarchal system of the family (Gutting, *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* 20). For example, instead of remembering her past with resentment, Zaat reminisces over its practices and envisages Abdel Maguid as a symbol of its waning days of security. In this way, the patriarchal family in the past and the present constructs a Panopticon system in which Zaat disciplines herself by submitting to these institutions. Her strict mother, who internalizes patriarchy, resembles the "gaze" of the center tower, which monitors her every action and controls her behavior.

After Nasser, the economic situation in Egypt started to deteriorate and affect the middle class to which Zaat and Abdel Maguid belong. The decline of the economy forced many Egyptian men like Abdel Maguid to “tear down the high fences of the harem and to transform women into productive, useful and good citizens” (Talhami 80). As a result, Abdel Maguid reneged on his decision and requested that Zaat find a job in order to balance their economic situation:

Zaat dropped out of college and was delivered from the problems of commuting and the incessant crowds. She devoted her time to looking after the home and operating the incubator while Abdel Maguid continued not to sit for the annual graduation exam, and the cost of living continued to rise. Then one day Abdel Maguid announced, in that same uncompromising tone of voice, that her staying at home had no “*meening*” and that she would have to work like other women. (*Zaat* 10; *Dhat* 16)

The narrator’s sarcasm reappears in such words as “incubator,” showing his perception of Zaat’s domestic role. On the other hand, Zaat’s compliance with Abdel Maguid’s new decision, made in an “uncompromising tone of voice,” illustrates Zaat’s diffident character and uncertainty, which causes her to mess up housework “under the stern and watchful eyes of Abdel Maguid” (*Zaat* 10; *Dhat* 17). In this moment, the gaze of Zaat’s stern mother transforms into the “watchful eyes” of Abdel Maguid. The stringent look becomes the new gaze of the central tower in the marriage Panopticon. The same gaze of the “watching eyes” reappears to observe Zaat’s rituals and discipline her behavior. Abdel Maguid uses this disciplinary power when he decides that Zaat should put on the headscarf or at least cover her head (*Zaat* 168-169; *Dhat* 178-179). Abdel

Maguid's decision is also the result of a specific discourse in Egyptian society at the time.

During the 1980s, Islamists started to promote a religious discourse of identity that governed women's behavior, dress, and appearance (Moghadam 45). Therefore, Zaat's femininity becomes an anomaly to the new "Islamic" discourse of the institution of marriage in Egyptian society. Zaat is subjected to the conventional gender roles and her femininity becomes an aberration to the prevailing discourse in her society.

In addition to marriage, another institution intervenes in Zaat's life. This powerful force is the workplace. In the novel, the narrator explores Zaat's workplace and offers his reader an in-depth look into her professional and social encounters with her superiors and colleagues. First, we notice the narrator's emphasis on the importance of gossip in Zaat's workplace. He nicknames it "transmission" and names the female colleagues who practice gossip "transmission machines." Most of the novel revolves around gossip and its effect on Zaat and her life. Before Zaat's move to the Archives, the gossip around her tackles political and national news and, with a limited amount of participation, she listens to the newspaper reporters and editors. The reporters' gossip offers points of view which cannot be published in a national newspaper. After Zaat's transfer to the Archives, the nature of the gossip around her changes into frivolous and mundane personal matters in the lives of her female co-workers. This transformation is the product of the shift in the educational level of her colleagues. The machines' gossip about their personal lives becomes a projection of the national reality displayed in the newspaper clippings and quotes. Thus, gossip becomes a means to explore the relationship between reality, its collective representation, and ethical action (Mehrez 89). However, the workplace gossip serves a different purpose for Zaat who wishes to develop her own gossip skills and contribute to the "transmission sessions" in the Archives. Through judgemental looks and silences, the gaze of the

Panopticon central tower moves from Abdel Maguid's eyes to those of Zaat's co-workers. As the narrative develops, Zaat seeks to appease and avoid the punishment of the machines' gaze, which is ostracism. In other words, the machines at the workplace replace Abdel Maguid in the same way that Abdel Maguid replaces Zaat's strict mother.

In addition, the secluded location of the Archives department contributes to Zaat's subjection in the workplace. The Archives is a perfect example of what Foucault describes as a "protected place of disciplinary monotony" (*Discipline and Punish* 141). It facilitates Zaat's behavior and observes her adherence to the workplace's regulations. When Zaat is transferred to the Archives, she occupies a room where "There was one picture on the walls, of the new president of course, underneath which sat the head of the department (who else?)" (*Zaat* 16; *Dhat* 22-23). In its seclusion, the Archives become a way to render new employees into banal individuals, whose biggest concerns are the frivolous details of their personal lives. Foucault argues that the perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly (*Discipline and Punish* 173). The gaze of Zaat's supervisor achieves this purpose through his position which enables him to constantly observe the Archives staff. In addition to the gaze of her superior, another metaphorical gaze appears in the workplace and observes the behavior of Zaat and her colleagues. The picture of the president and its location above the head of Zaat's supervisor are both clear manifestations of the observation described by Foucault as a means of disciplining human subjects. Consequently, the supervisor who stands for the president in the picture, located above his head, becomes another central tower gaze which constantly monitors the workplace.

If Zaat's Archives is a Panopticon prison system, then her nature of work in this establishment can be perceived as a form of penal labor:

Sticking and filing clippings, which the boss chose, on those days he happened to be present (for his encyclopedia, unlike Aminophis's required movement). And examining the original sources they came from, which were stacked up in the corners ready to be sold by the kilogram: countless newspapers and magazines that had responded to public malaise with empty political speeches and resounding slogans. (*Zaat* 19; *Dhat* 25)

According to Foucault, the purpose of penal labor in the prison system is to transform the violent, agitated, unreflective convict into an individual who plays his role with perfect regularity (*Discipline and Punish* 242). This purpose would not seem irrelevant, when Ibrahim explains that Zaat's transfer to the Archives was an act of punishment. The transfer took place when Zaat refused, in a sudden act of courage, to replace the picture of her favorite president Nasser in the office with the picture of Sadat (*Zaat* 15; *Dhat* 22). Zaat was clearly superfluous on the forgotten premises of the newspaper and her new supervisor "didn't know what to do with her" (*Zaat* 16; *Dhat* 23). Like the location of her department, Zaat is forgotten and gradually loses her sense of self in the daily "transmission sessions" of her female colleagues. In addition, Zaat's work ceases to be productive and becomes disciplinary. The repetitive nature of her work as an archivist suggests a sense of regularity and monotony. Foucault explains the disciplinary nature of regular and monotonous activity in *Discipline and Punish* as follows:

It is intrinsically useful, not as an activity of production, but by virtue of the effect it has on the human mechanism. It is a principle of order and regularity; through the demands that it imposes, it conveys, imperceptibly, the forms of a rigorous power; it bends bodies



to regular movements, it excludes agitation and distraction, it imposes a hierarchy and a surveillance that are all the more accepted, and which will be inscribed all the more deeply in the behavior of the convicts. (242)

In this way, both gossip and penal labor embed in Zaat the habits of order and obedience, transforming her into an individual who conforms to the general norms of society. The routine of the Archives serves to subdue Zaat in her workplace and filing the clippings and participating in the gossip of the machines expose her to the power relations of the workplace.

Religious institutions also play an important role in Zaat's life. Events begin during the Nasser era and end during Mubarak's rule when the relationship between religion and the state undergoes many changes. This transformation affects the Egyptian middle class to which Zaat belongs. During the 1950s and 1960s Arab nationalism pushed religion into the private sphere of homes, mosques, and churches, and away from the public arena of streets, schools, and universities (Osman 79). Egyptian women, likewise, were affected by Nasser's vision. For example, although the Nasser regime was not successful in overcoming patriarchy in Egyptian society, Nasser's era fulfilled the aspirations of Egyptian women on the educational and professional levels. Zaat's liberal clothes and her educational and professional aspirations illustrated this modernized perception of religion which prevailed during the Nasser era. However, a number of events or "shocks", as Ibrahim calls them, changed the attitude of Egyptians towards religion during the 1970s and 1980s. Following the 1967 defeat and the failure of the nationalist dream, as well as a considerable number of corruption cases in the 1970s, Egyptians began to reconsider their modernized view of religion. Ibrahim gives the reader some examples of "shocks" during the Sadat era such as political corruption, bribery of

journalists by politicians, and the embezzlement of employers. Furthermore, the growing influence of religious institutions reshaped the reality of Egyptians. In the novel, Ibrahim quotes from Sheikh Sharawi, Sheikh El Ghazaly, and Sheikh Kishk as examples of the circulation of religious discourses in the political, economic, and social arenas. The new religious reality of Egypt crept into Zaat's private sphere when "Abdel Maguid stopped drinking, poured half a bottle he had been saving for special occasions down the toilet, began to pray regularly, and bought the works of Sheikh Shaarawi though he did not read them" (*Zaat* 147; *Dhat* 157). Zaat's workplace was also influenced by the discourses of this new religious reality. Ibrahim describes the effect of the Islamic movement in the 1970s on Zaat's workplace where an obsession with the Islamic way of dressing takes over her female colleagues and she finds herself ignored by them because her turban does not fulfill their new obsession. By the end of the workday, Zaat realizes that the reason for her ostracization at the workplace is her co-workers' skepticism of her religious devotion. Therefore, she decides to enroll her son in the Islamic University. Thus, Zaat changes from one who submits to conformity into one who makes decisions and takes action.

The rise of Islamism affects another important aspect in Zaat's life: Muslim-Christian relations. Ibrahim highlights the effects of the prevailing Islamist discourses on Zaat's interactions with her Christian co-workers:

All of a sudden there was Rabbit Face, exploding at her with penciled eyebrows raised: "Have we no one but this Christian to sign in for now?" Kind generous Zaat was a loyal daughter of Gamal Abdel Nasser's revolution, brought up on the principle that all people are equal regardless of religion or sex or wealth or rank or position. For this reason she omitted to inquire after Nadia's family name in order to ascertain her true identity, a fact

that had not been ignored by the vigilant machines .... But she was a coward and she stopped visiting Aminophis in his office and she avoided Nadia. (*Zaat* 89; *Dhat* 97-98)

Despite her Nasser-era ideals of equality, Zaat submits to religious prejudice at work. She stops signing for Nadia and avoids her at work. She also stops her friendliness towards her previous supervisor Aminophis. Later in the novel, Zaat's compliance extends to her home where she stops her maid from listening to her Coptic hymns on tape. The effect of the new religious discourses permeates the social layers of the private sphere. In this way, the power discourse of religious institutions affects Zaat's behavior and exposes her to power relations which discipline her into conformity.

The worsening economic situation in Egypt further contributes to Zaat's subjection. In the novel, the defeat and neglect of the middle class in the Sadat and Mubarak eras are epitomized in the "march of demolition and construction." In order to join this march, Zaat and the residents of her building are constantly subjected to discourses of consumerism when they wish to renovate their kitchens or replace locally made pipes with "shining long lasting 'sober diyooti' Italian ones" (*Zaat* 46-47; *Dhat* 54). Ibrahim also highlights the decline of the middle class and infrastructure as reflected in Zaat's street and building "which had been so peaceful and shaded when they moved into it" but "had filled with small stores and car mechanics' workshops and was covered in sewage and rubbish" (*Zaat* 43; *Dhat* 51). Ibrahim uses the decaying state of the building and the street as a metaphor for the decaying state of the country. As for Zaat, she resorts to crying as an expression of her defeat and subjection. The more her economic and social frustration worsens, the more frequently she breaks down. Her economic

situation contributes to her sense of defeat. Nevertheless, she is able to perform small acts of resistance to the discourses of power in her society on the economic and social levels.

Foucault notes that there are no relations of power without resistance, which is effective and real because it is found at the moment of the exercise of power (*Power/knowledge* 142). Thus, an analysis of Zaat's character can offer the reader a fresh perspective on the widely held conception of Zaat as an "anti-hero." In spite of the power discourses in the family, workplace, as well as religious and economic institutions, Zaat still manages to resist them. For example, Zaat's dreams resemble an act of resistance as they oftentimes provide her with the inner strength to complete a project. Moreover, Zaat uses entrepreneurship and sisterhood to confront power discourses in society.

One example of agency occurs during the bathroom plumbing incident. In this incident, Zaat disagrees with the interior decorator:

The only objection to this solution came from Zaat...Abdel Maguid brushed aside her objection as usual but Zaat stuck to her point of view. Zaat had changed. She was no longer that speechless submissive listener she had once been, and, thanks to the transmission exercises, words no longer stumbled off her tongue and letters no longer rode on top of one another. (*Zaat* 51; *Dhat* 59)

Abdel Maguid uses the same punishment as that of Zaat's co-workers, social boycotting, as a response to her resistance. However, due to Zaat's familiarity with this type of punishment in the Archives, by the time Abdel Maguid begins to apply it, his attempts cease to be effective. A

similar incident takes place when Zaat manages to launch the project of remodeling the bathroom and kitchen against Abdel Maguid's wishes.

The march was moving nearer to Zaat's own door and she had no choice but to join its ranks, despite the opposition of Abdel Maguid. With her determination strengthened by the betrayal of her business partners she implemented a strict economic policy: ... after the machines at the Archives had found her the ubiquitous plumber, and faced Abdel Maguid with a *fait accompli*. (*Zaat* 60-61; *Dhat* 69)

Zaat's resistance to Abdel Maguid succeeds because he is no longer the main source of her oppression. Because of her co-workers in the Archives, Zaat is no longer intimidated by Abdel Maguid.

Zaat's agency becomes more evident in her use of entrepreneurship as a resistance mechanism to multiple power discourses. For example, Ibrahim highlights Zaat's entrepreneurship skills in her myriad attempts to start small businesses. Zaat's entrepreneurship projects range from selling night dresses smuggled from Port Said or dealing in goods from the Ministry of Supplies in the workplace to the pan project and the unfinished pickles business projects with her neighbors Samiha and El Shanqeety. She also uses a sewing machine to make clothes and sell them in her workplace. These small businesses are the backbone of Zaat's economic resistance. Her projects also highlight the importance of the notion of freedom highlighted by Foucault.

Zaat possesses a limited amount of freedom that allows her to perform different actions in response to the dominant power relations in her society. Her actions range from compliance to

resistance. For instance, Zaat's innovative financial skills aim to resist the patriarchal power of Abdel Maguid, represented in his unjustified objection to the "march of demolition and construction." The name is given by the narrator to the phenomenon of home renovation which prevailed during this period and was encouraged by the discourses of consumerism in the Egyptian media. Stuck in the economic paralysis of the middle class, Zaat longs to free herself and her family from the immobility of their social class. She realizes the bitter reality of this immobility whenever she makes comparisons between herself and her female relatives. These comparisons emphasize the stagnation in Zaat's life and motivate her to find alternative economic means as little acts of resistance. Zaat's different attempts to find alternative sources of income aim at resisting her sense of economic subjection and inferiority in comparison to her relatives.

Another example of the discourses of power is dreams. In the novel, Ibrahim uses dreams to interweave Zaat's imagination with her bleak reality. In her dreams, Zaat sees her heroes, oppressors, sexual fantasies, and aspirations. Zaat's dreams become more complicated as her life does. At first, Zaat only sees her father and Gamal Abdel Nasser in her dreams. However, with time, new characters introduce themselves in her dreams:

The nocturnal visits that Zaat received increased. They had at first been confined to her father and Gamal Abdel Nasser, but they had now been joined by Manal's husband after he got his PhD, and for no particular reason, an old visitor from her university days, Aziz, Safiya's husband. There was also a surprise visit, which was not to be repeated for many years from Mounir Zaher, the corpulent journalist. These visits were characterized by a

considerable amount of sweet tenderness until some violence started to creep in. (*Zaat* 49; *Dhat* 57)

The common factor between these dream characters is their ability to provide emotional or financial security for Zaat. To resist her emotional and financial insecurity, Zaat creates an alternative storyline in which she seeks support from her life heroes. Zaat's father and Nasser are father figures. On the other hand, the husbands of Safiya and Manal represent the financial security missing from her life with Abdel Maguid. Mounir Zaher, with his pleasant personality and interesting news transmissions, represents for Zaat the ideal work colleague who should replace the merciless machines at the Archives, while Aziz represents a lost romantic interest who reminds her of her peaceful past. Zaat invokes her heroes in dreams to resist her insecurities.

In addition to representing Zaat's inner conflicts, dreams serve to motivate her acts of agency. For example, Nasser and Sadat's "hammers of demolition" serve as a motivation to complete her "march of demolition and construction" (*Zaat* 61; *Dhat* 70). In addition, the sudden appearance of Aziz in Zaat's dreams motivates her to travel to Alexandria to visit him and Safiya in an attempt to search for the lost university student in herself. While in Alexandria, Zaat's emotional insecurity increases and presents itself in fears of Abdel Maguid's unfaithfulness. This motivates her to return home and to have another child with him. In other words, Zaat's dreams motivate her resistance and assist her in facing the economic, emotional, religious, and social setbacks in her life.

Moreover, sisterhood plays a major role in the novel. In the first few pages, the circle of sisterhood at the Archives stands against Zaat. However, in her relationship with Himmat, Safiya and Samiha, Zaat finds the means to resist various discourses of power. For the most part, Zaat's

character lacks zeal or “Hemma,” part of the Arab princess’s name “Zaat al-Hemma;” therefore, she needs Hemma to be whole. The character of Himmat, an active female journalist in the newspaper where Zaat works, is the opposite of Zaat. Himmat’s character represents Zaat’s alter ego or “Other.” For instance, she plays the role of the alter ego during the olive can fraud incident. When Zaat discovers an expired olive can, she decides to file a case against the grocer to the authorities. After several bureaucratic adventures, both Zaat and Himmat succeed in filing the complaint to the health authorities. The collaboration between Zaat and Himmat brings the two parts of Zaat’s character together and transforms her into a true “Zaat al-Hemma.” This female bonding between Zaat and Himmat unfolds Zaat’s impulse to resist discourses of power in her society.

Samaha, Zaat’s neighbor brings to light another perspective on sisterhood. Unlike Zaat, Samaha’s young age and audacity have not been affected yet by society. However, she suffers domestic abuse. Nevertheless, Samaha insists on filing for divorce from El Shanqeety and Zaat agrees to assist her in filing for divorce. Thus Zaat resists Samaha’s family’s oppression and, by extension, her own.

Zaat also depends on the assistance of other women when she objects to the female circumcision of her daughters. She consults with Samaha and other friends who encourage her to dismiss the idea. Her friendships become an act of resistance to the forms of subjection and control of women’s sexuality in society. Zaat undertakes a trip to Alexandria to seek the support of her childhood best friend and university colleague Safiya. This is an effort to regain herself from Abdel Maguid, the Archives co-workers, and general corruption in her society. However, due to Zaat’s ambivalent character, she reduces her situation to a limited choice: “either I’ll leave him or I’ll get pregnant again” (*Zaat* 110; *Dhat* 120). Unlike Samaha and Himmat who are still



young and rebellious, Safiyya is defeated. Zaat discovers that Saifiyya and Aziz's condition seems to be worse than hers. Therefore, Zaat's resistance wanes and she returns to Abdel Maguid. She fails in her resistance attempt when she discovers the failure of her heroes Safiyya and Aziz. She internalizes their failure and mirrors their surrender to society. Like her mother who internalized patriarchal family values, Zaat this time internalizes the economic, political and religious defeat of her lifelong friends. Her internalization leads to her subjection to the dominant discourses in her society and she returns to Abdel Maguid to have another child with him.

Zaat's moments of resistance reach a climax when she confronts her oppressors. In the novel, Ibrahim challenges the conventions of fiction by placing the climax in the middle of events. In this way, the confrontations divide the narrative of Zaat's life into a "before" and "after" which introduces the consequences in the following chapters. In other words, Ibrahim hastens the climax of the narrative in order to have an anti-climactic ending. During both confrontations, Zaat seems quite aware of her subjugation and oppression. For example, after the school bus accident, which takes the lives of seventy students at her daughter's school on the way back from a school trip but which her daughter miraculously misses due to sudden illness, Zaat regrets her abandonment of her education and professional aspirations for the sake of marriage. She also reaches a state of epiphany in which she blames Abdel Maguid for their poor economic situation. The situation ends with a usual crying episode in her bathroom and with Abdel Maguid's retirement to bed. Through her confrontation, Zaat struggles against the way she "internalized her social demands" as Ells describes the situation of women (218). In this state of internalization, she disciplines herself into abandoning her own education for the sake of patriarchal family discourses. By confronting oppressors such as Abdel Maguid, Zaat articulates the inner conflicts of her dreams and moves her struggle to the real world.

The second confrontation between Zaat and Abdel Maguid takes place when Abdel Maguid clumsily knocks Zaat's sewing machine to the ground. In this moment, Zaat unleashes her alter ego and blames Abdel Maguid for her misery as a wife and mother and for their continuous economic struggles:

The new confrontation allowed Zaat to allude to what she called the biggest mistake she had ever made, and to mention some particular supporting proofs: she had wasted her life in the kitchen, bringing up the girls and looking after Abdel Maguid. In any case it had now become most urgent not only to join the march but also to look far beyond that and to prepare, from now, to marry off the two girls. (*Zaat* 92; *Dhat* 101)

The confrontation ends with another act of resistance, her escape to Alexandria to seek the support of Safiya. However, her attempt is doomed to failure.

Another confrontation is Zaat's with Umm Waheed, her maid. The confrontation takes place after Zaat's discovery of her thefts. In this case, Zaat's confrontation is also futile as she shows tolerance and sympathy for Umm Waheed's "correctionist economic policy" (*Zaat* 336; *Dhat* 351). Ultimately, Zaat seems to accept that corruption has become the norm in society. She fails because she realizes the vanity of any resistance to corruption in her community.

Zaat attempts to resist the dominant power relations in her society through multiple acts of resistance. She uses acts of agency, dreams, entrepreneurship, sisterhood, and confrontation as resistance mechanisms against the patriarchal, economic, and religious power discourses in her society. However, her attempts fail and she eventually accepts her position as a prisoner inside the cells of the different Panopticons in her life. Her defeat results from the internalization

and projection of the defeat of her mother, her past heroes, and her neighbors. In addition, Zaat's abandonment by strong female characters such as Himmat and Samiha also contributes to her eventual defeat against the power discourses in her society. Therefore, Zaat's realization of her different forms of subjection and her moments of epiphany across the novel prove insufficient to achieve success in her resistance. This is due to the role of knowledge discourses in constructing the individual's perception and behavior in society. The prolonged effect of the discourses of patriarchy, consumerism, and corruption in Zaat's life enhances her failure in countering the effects of such discourses. In the final pages of the novel, Zaat resorts to her bathroom or Wailing Wall as an attempt to heal the pain of her defeat and disappointments. Despite her defeat, Zaat's resistance across the novel highlights her recognition of her subjection by the dominant discourses of power in her society and emphasizes her attempt to mitigate the negative effects of such discourses on her life and the lives of other female characters in the novel.

## Chapter 2:

### Discourses of Power and Female Resistance in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*

Sue Monk Kidd narrates the events of *The Secret Life of Bees* against the political and historical backdrop of the African-American Civil Rights movement (1945-1968). In 1964, the setting of the novel, the characters live in an acute state of racism in which black Americans face racial segregation in schools, public places, transportation, and employment. As a result, an African-American Civil Rights movement emerged with a vision of a racially integrated society, a vision to be achieved by non-violent means and an emphasis on removing barriers to individual equality in the public sphere (Rooney 163-164). Kidd, who witnessed this period as a white southern adolescent girl, was influenced by its historical and political struggles and tensions. In *A Conversation with Sue Monk Kidd*, she explains the reason for her choice of this particular historical period as a backdrop for her novel:

despite the African-American women who prominently populated the world of my childhood, there were enormous racial divides. I vividly remember the summer of 1964 with its voter registration drives, boiling racial tension, and the erupting awareness of the cruelty of racism. I was never the same after that summer. I was left littered with memories I could not digest. I think I knew even back then that one day I would have to find a kind of redemption for them through writing. (*A Penguin Readers Guide* 4)

To reach this state of redemption, Kidd was keen on linking the fictional lives of her characters with the historical and political reality of this period. In the novel, TV, the radio, and newspapers are presented as centerpieces in the lives of the female characters and contribute to their awareness of their political and racial surroundings. Throughout the novel, the female characters use the media to follow up on the political and historical situation in their country. As fictional characters, they also share common characteristics with Kidd. For example, she highlights the similarities which she shares with her protagonist Lily:

As an adolescent, I went to charm school, where I learned to pour tea and relate to boys, which, as I recall, meant giving them the pickle jar to unscrew, whether it was too hard for me or not. And there is the fact that Lily and I both wanted to be writers, that we rolled our hair on grape juice cans, refused to eat grits, and created model fallout shelters for our seventh-grade science projects. We also both had nannies, but otherwise Lily and I are more different than alike. (*A Penguin Readers Guide 5*)

In other words, during her adolescent years, Kidd was affected by the same social institutions that affected the female characters in the novel. She also shared with Lily the same discourse of femininity which prevailed in the South during this period. This connection highlights the sphere of the personal, as critics of feminism and Foucault note, which includes the ways of life, style, behavior, sexual relations, language gestures, and the sphere of the political in a certain community (Diamond and Quinby 4). The analysis of both spheres can be utilized to uncover the role of social institutions in embedding discourses on women in the community of the South. The power relations produced by these social institutions result in the development of a sense of

female agency and empowerment, which motivates the female characters in the novel to perform acts of resistance against the different forms of subjection in their society. In the novel, gender and race are two forms of oppression of women (Robnett 198). The link between race and gender is of vital importance in the novel because in societies, where racial discrimination is endemic to the socio-cultural fabric, law, economy, institutions, and discourses, gender is linked to racial identity (Robnett 40). The relationship between the two categories of gender and race in the novel affects the female characters' subjectivity and their perception of their capabilities and surroundings. They attempt to resist the effect of race and gender power relations in their societies through agency, religion, sisterhood, dreams, and entrepreneurship.

Lily, the main female character in Sue Monk Kidd's novel *The Secret life of Bees*, is a fourteen-year-old white girl who lives in South Carolina in the United States with an abusive father since her mother's death when Lily was four years old. To escape her father's abuse and to know the truth about her mother's death, Lily leaves home with her black maid Rosaleen after helping her escape from hospital. They go to Tiburon where Lily hopes to find answers to the questions she has about her mother's death. After reaching Tiburon, Lily and Rosaleen arrive at the pink house of the three bee-keeping sisters, May, June, and August. In this house, Lily finds the answer to her questions after discovering that the three sisters knew her deceased mother. The three sisters also help Lily find her inner source of strength and grow as a woman.

The institution of the family affects the perception and behavior of the female characters in the novel. For Lily, family plays an essential role in her upbringing and growth. The author highlights the patriarchal nature of Lily's family in different parts of the novel. For example, in her conversation with August, Lily describes the physical labor which she endures in order to serve her father:

I was thinking, *Well, it's not just marriage that's set up like that. What about me waiting on T. Ray hand and foot, and we were just father and daughter? Pour me some more tea, Lily. Polish shoes, Lily. Go get the truck keys Lily.* I sincerely hoped she didn't mean this sort of thing went on in a marriage. (*The Secret Life of Bees* 146; emphasis in original)

The unhappiness which she feels within her family as a daughter leads her to refrain from calling him “father” or “Dad,” referring to him instead by his first name T. Ray. Patriarchy breaks the emotional bond of father and daughter. T. Ray also prevents Lily from reading books and mocks her interest in them. Lily tries to explain to herself her father's hatred of books: “What kind of person is against reading? I think he believed it would stir up ideas of college, which he thought a waste of money for girls, even if they did, like, me score the highest number a human being can get on their verbal aptitude test” (*The Secret Life of Bees* 15). To further mock Lily's intellectual aspirations, T. Ray calls her “Miss Emily-Big-Head-Diction” and “Miss Brown-Nose-in-a-Book” (*The Secret Life of Bees* 16). As a result, Lily internalizes her oppression and adjusts her career aspirations to Beauty College, until her English teacher tells her otherwise: ““Please, Lily, you are insulting your fine intelligence. Do you have any idea how smart you are? You could be a professor or a writer with actual books to your credit. Beauty school. Please”” (*The Secret Life of Bees* 16). In this way, Lily suffers from oppression by her father who symbolizes the patriarchal views of women's educational and professional aspirations.

Growing up with a patriarchal father, Lily is not able to be as feminine and fashionable as her school colleagues and becomes an object of scornful looks and whispers at school. Nevertheless, her eagerness to join charm school at the Women's Club in order to learn how to be a “proper” lady is a point of interest. The analysis of this point is interesting because “the

discourses of women's nature and disciplining practices are especially relevant with regard to the production of 'proper' feminine bodies and subjectivities" (Amigot and Pujal 650-651). For example, the discourses of femininity promoted by the charm school shape female adolescents in Lily's community into "normal" and "popular" young women. They teach girls "how to walk and pivot, what to do with your ankles when you sit in a chair, how to get into a car, pour tea, take off your gloves, arrange flowers in a vase, talk to boys, tweeze your eyebrows, shave your legs, apply lipstick" (*The Secret Life of Bees* 10). Thus, Lily sees herself as an object marked by gender (Amigot and Pujal 664). For example, Lily describes the effect of the observers of her femininity: "I worried so much about how I looked and whether I was doing things right, I felt half the time I was impersonating a girl instead of really being one" (*The Secret Life of Bees* 9). The "cashmere twinsets and plaid kilts midhigh" which were "fashionable to wear" emphasize the obsession with the female body as a docile and subjected entity which must succumb to a certain discourse of femininity (*The Secret Life of Bees* 9). Thus, Lily's desire to adhere to her school's standards of femininity illustrates what feminist critics note as women's internalization of patriarchal standards of acceptance (Diamond and Quinby 77). In addition, Lily develops a feeling of shame when she is unable to conform to the discourse of femininity at her school. This shame stems from her feeling that the body she inhabits is deficient and that she ought to take better care of herself. At this point, Lily knows only a certain discourse of femininity which controls her perception of her body and relations with others. On the other hand, T. Ray's perception of Lily's femininity is another form of oppression. He perceives the female body as a "strategic space, devoid of bio power and subject to a process of progressive objectification and control" (Amigot and Pujal 648). To him, Lily has no say and is not allowed to express her opinion concerning the way she dresses or her femininity. He even does not care if she wears



clothes which she describes as “outfits only the Pentecostal girls wore” (*The Secret Life of Bees* 8-9). The patriarchy of Lily’s father is an example of what Diamond and Quinby describe as an ancient régime’s type of patriarchy, in which power was wielded by individuals who are known to the woman and in which her body was subject to sanctions if she disobeyed (80). In Lily’s case, these sanctions are kneeling on Martha White grits. The sanctions are frequent and expected by Lily whenever she disobeys one of T. Ray’s patriarchal rules. Eventually, Lily views her actions as wrong actions and accepts T. Ray’s right to punish her for them. However, despite the visibility of the power relations in this case as opposed to its anonymity in the charm school, the grits’ torture inflicted on Lily can be perceived as a disciplinary mechanism.

Another discourse which contributes to the subjection of women in the novel is the religious institution. The presence of priests, churches, and religion in general lays emphasis on the effects of religious discourses on characters, especially Lily, Rosaleen, and the three bee-keeping sisters, May, June and August. Religion is interwoven with gendered, racial, and social discourses in the novel. In Lily’s Southern town, Baptism and Methodism are the official religion as opposed to Catholicism. The official discourse of Lily’s town church strengthens the subjection of Catholics: Brother Gerald maintains that “hell was nothing but a bonfire for Catholics” (*The Secret Life of Bees* 58). On the other hand, the discourse of her church also contributes to the subjection of women. For instance, Lily describes the religious discourse of her church as one which “didn’t believe in women having a lot of say about things” (*The Secret Life of Bees* 58). As a result, T. Ray, who goes to this church for forty years, advises Lily to “stay out of” Rosaleen’s version of religion and describes it as “plain wacko” (*The Secret Life of Bees* 29-30). Branded as a “wacko,” Rosaleen is excluded by T. Ray. Thus, religious and gender discourses are interconnected in the way they contribute to the subjection of Rosaleen.

The religious institution also contributes to the racial oppression of Rosaleen in the novel. For example, due to the laws of racial segregation at the time, she is not allowed to attend the same churches which are attended by the white Southerners. George Lewis points out that during this period, a great number of southerners were ideologically disposed to white supremacy and could not conceive of a world in which non-whites were both their de-jure and de-facto equals (13). Lily describes the response of her town towards religious desegregation:

She was not supposed to be inside here. Every time a rumor got going about a group of Negroes coming to worship with us on Sunday morning, the deacons stood locked-arms across the church steps to turn them away. We loved them in the Lord, Brother Gerald said, but they had their own places. (*The Secret Life of Bees* 30)

The racial and religious discourse in Lily's town does not permit Rosaleen to enter Lily's Baptist church. Combined with each other, race and religion form an oppressive discourse which encourages the inferiority of Rosaleen. Rosaleen further experiences this form of subjection when Lily shows her the picture of the black Mary. Lily describes the effect of the Black Mary on Rosaleen:

“Well, if you ain't noticed, she's colored,” said Rosaleen, and I could tell it was having an effect on her by the way she kept gazing at it with her mouth parted. I could read her thought: if Jesus's mother is black, how come we only know about the white Mary? This would be like women finding out Jesus had a twin sister who'd gotten half God's genes but none of the glory. (*The Secret Life of Bees* 52)

Foucault's notion of power/knowledge becomes visible when Rosaleen discovers a new religious discourse, one which she thought was hidden from black people in order to embed their racial and religious subjection. When a new source of knowledge exists, a new type of power relation is born. For Rosaleen, racial segregation in the white church is a manifestation of the ugly racial reality which she endures as a Southern black woman. Therefore, when Lily shows Rosaleen the picture of the black Mary, a new relationship between Rosaleen and the religious institution begins to form. She starts to trust the religious institution because she discovers that the divine comes in colors other than white.

The media plays an important role in the subjugation of women in the novel as well. During the Civil Rights movement, the media fully covered its news. For example, A CBS reporter highlights this role when he says that "the negro revolution of the 1960s could not have occurred without the television coverage that brought it to almost every home in the land" (Bodroghkozy 41). During this period, violence and demonstrations erupted across the country in relation to the growing scope of the Civil Rights movement and the rising tension between the segregationists and integrationists. By 1964, the year of the novel's events, the escalated state of violence became a national sensation and the media covered racial unrest on a daily basis. In the novel, Kidd presents the media as an integral part in the lives of the black female characters. On one occasion, Lily enters the room to find Rosaleen fixing the TV picture in order to watch the signature of the Civil Rights Act by President Johnson. On other occasions, television and the radio are also presented as the center of the lives of the three bee-keeping sisters. Their daily routine involves gathering around TV after supper in order to watch the Walter Cronkite news segment. For instance, August comments on the news by saying that she is afraid it is only a

matter of time before her household sees things like that happen in Tiburon (*The Secret Life of Bees* 88). Media representations of the blacks also contribute to the racial oppression of the female characters in their Southern town. Oftentimes, the type of covered news involves violence inflicted by a group of white people on black Civil Rights activists. Other news segments involve unfortunate endings for blacks who attempt to resist racial segregation. The news segments present blacks as victims, not as individuals in a state of empowerment. When presented at all, blacks appear only as silenced school children, single or small groups, surrounded by larger numbers of whites. In this way, the media coverage reinforces the oppression of blacks and further encourages acts of racial and physical subjection in the novel.

The law further contributes to the fate of the female characters in the novel. Kidd presents the police as an institution which does not understand the meaning of its famous motto “protect and serve”. For example, the relation between law and race appears in the physical abuse of Rosaleen on the police station premises:

When her tear glands were finally exhausted, I said, “What happened to you?”

"After you left, that policeman called Shoe let those men come in for their apology."

"They hit you again?"

"Two of them held me by the arms while the other one hit me—the one with the flashlight. He said, "Nigger, you say you're sorry."

When I didn't, he came at me. He hit me till the policeman said that was enough. They didn't get no apology, though." (*The Secret Life of Bees* 46)

Mr. Avery Gaston, the policeman and the representative of the law, permits Rosaleen's physical punishment. His abuse of his power is a manifestation and direct consequence of the racial discourse of the South. In Gaston's point of view, Rosaleen transgresses the discourse of segregation in the South by registering for the vote. Therefore, he thinks that Rosaleen deserves punishment for two reasons. First, she challenges segregation in the South and, second, she attempts to resist her inferiority and pours snuff juice on the shoes of the white segregationists. In addition to reinforcing the dominant racial power relations in the South, the policeman also attempts to silence the counter discourse, symbolized by Lily. Thus he threatens to let her father "deal with" her (*The Secret Life of Bees* 33). His encouragement of T. Ray's physical abuse is a punishment for Lily's deviation from the normal discourse of racial segregation as well.

Another incident in which the law is complicit in the subjection of women happens during May's death investigation. The policeman, Mr. Hazelwurst, seems concerned with the fact that Lily is staying in a house of black people. He takes Lily aside and advises her to call her aunt and tell her to pick her up even if she is not feeling well because it is not natural for Lily to be staying with colored people (*The Secret Life of Bees* 198). The use of the word "natural" by the policeman takes the reader to Foucault's notion of "normality." Lily, as a white girl who is familiar with the racial discourse in her small Southern town, is perceived by the policeman as an "abnormal" individual who does not follow the natural discourse of racial segregation. During this period in the South, the presence of white women in a black community provoked anger among local whites (Robnett 121). Therefore, the existence of Lily in the house of black people provokes the policeman who encourages her to leave their house. The control of Lily's actions by the policeman transforms her into an object which can be manipulated by the law. In this way, both Lily and Rosaleen become subjugated by the Southern law in the novel.

The three bee-keeping sisters May, June, and August, who live in Tiburon's pink house, have similar fates. Since the era of the Civil Rights and women's rights struggles in the 1960s, race and gender have been variously represented as being "parallel," "intersecting," and "overlapping" systems of identity formation which structure social relations (Rooney 232). In the novel, the sisters suffer from different power discourses. August, for example, is not able to find a job as a teacher with her teaching degree because "there weren't that many places for Negroes to teach," so she ended up "working nine years as a housekeeper" (*The Secret Life of Bees* 145). Thus, racial discourses stifle August's professional aspirations and force her into servitude.

For June, subjection takes other forms. After being abandoned at the altar, June feels humiliation, resentment, and mistrust of the institution of marriage. This mistrust is highlighted in her rejection of Neil's repeated marriage proposals. The trauma she experiences affects her social behavior and perception of others in society. Race affects June's perception of herself and others as well. She internalizes the discourse of racial segregation by socially isolating Lily from the Daughters of Mary group. As a black woman who is aware of racial dominance in her community, June detests the fact that her sister August is working as a housekeeper for the family of Lily's mother. Therefore, when June meets Lily, she uses the same racial discourse from which she suffers against Lily. She treats her rudely and refuses her prayer to the black Mary:

I walked toward black Mary with my hand lifted. But just as I was about to reach her, June stopped playing. She stopped right in the middle of the song, and I was left in the silence with my hand stretched out. (*The Secret Life of Bees* 111)

June's actions stem from traumas she endured in the past such as gender subjugation and racial segregation. She punishes Lily because she represents the Southern oppressive racial discourse and punishes Neil because he represents the oppressive discourse of the institution of marriage. For the third sister May, unfairness and subjection affect her in a more profound way. After her twin sister April commits suicide as a result of depression caused by a childhood trauma of racial oppression, May also plunges into a deep state of depression whenever she hears about an incident of unfairness:

Our mother said she was like Mary, with her heart on the outside of her chest. Mother was good about taking care of her, but when she died, it fell to me and June. We tried for years to get May some help. She saw doctors, but they didn't have any idea what to do with her except put her away. So June and I came up with this idea of a wailing wall.

*(The Secret Life of Bees 97)*

The racial and patriarchal discourses to which May is exposed result in the production of new social power relations. May internalizes the effects of the subjugation inflicted on her sister April by the social institutions in their Southern town. She repeatedly experiences her late sister's subjection which manifests itself as chronic depression that drives her to the wailing wall. She finds comfort in crying, writing the source of her misery on pieces of paper and placing them within the gaps of the wall. May finds consolation and reconciliation in her presence by the wailing wall and attempts to heal the negative effects of the dominant discourses in her society. Therefore, race and the institution of marriage impose different forms of oppression on the three

bee-keeping sisters, August, June, and May, which affect their social behavior and their perception of themselves, others, and the world.

Gossip is also part of the oppression of women in the novel. For example, Lily mentions the white secretary's gossip as an expected response to her discovery of Lily's living arrangement. The secretary's gossip is an example of a disciplinary power mechanism, which is practiced by the townspeople in order to maintain the racial subjection of the three bee-keeping sisters. The townspeople use this mechanism in order to enforce and emphasize the racial power relations in their community. In using words such as "strange," the secretary defines the standards of her society and disapproves of Lily and the three sisters who do not conform to the racial discourse of segregation. Through gossip, the townspeople attempt to discipline Lily and the three bee-keeping sisters into conformity to the rules of racial segregation.

Gossip also plays a role in agitating violence in the Southern towns of the novel. This role emphasizes the power of the discourse of segregation. Through gossip, people become instruments in the hands of racial power relations. Lily describes the effect of gossip and rumors on her town:

In Sylvan we'd had a rumor at the first of the summer about a busload of people from New York City showing up to integrate the city pool. Talk about a panic. We had a citywide emergency on our hands, as there is no greater affliction for the southern mind than people up north coming down to fix our way of life. (*The Secret Life of Bees* 155)

New York City here refers to the success of the Civil Rights movement there as opposed to the South. Lily thinks of New York as a "foreign country" where she could be adopted by Rosaleen



(*The Secret Life of Bees* 12). This comparison shows the difference between the North and South in their views on racial segregation. The South ensures the adherence of others to segregation by using different methods including violence. The “stirring up” of people is a direct result of the segregationist discourse which permeates the South. In most cases, the violence against the blacks was carried out by white men in order to suppress the black community. In the novel, Lily describes the groups of white men who spread across Tiburon waiting for any act of black integration. Their goal is to discipline the individuals who perform these acts and subdue them to the discourse of racial segregation. Despite Foucault’s perception of power as a product of social relations which is not directly enforced on people from above, he does not eliminate violence as a disciplinary mechanism that can be used for practicing power on individuals. Kidd’s description of the white men’s eyes “casting quick glances up and down the sidewalk” resembles the gaze of the central tower which constantly observes prisoners’ actions. Thus, the five men’s malevolent behavior seeks to subject individuals to the dominant discourse.

Nonetheless, the female characters in the novel still manage to perform acts of resistance against the dominant power relations in their societies. Rosaleen, as a black female character who is suffering from racial and gender oppression, rejects the discourses which embed her subjection in the Southern community. For example, she separates from her husband in protest of against his excessive drinking. Lily highlights Rosaleen’s audacity, gumption, and untowardly nature. By throwing out her husband, Rosaleen rebels against the institution of marriage. On the other hand, when Rosaleen takes the decision to register to vote, she resists the racial oppression in her community. By registering to vote, Rosaleen practices what Sara Evans calls “participatory democracy” in which those who are affected by decisions make those decisions (135). She takes the decision to vote because she believes that her vote will positively affect the

quality of her life as a black Southern woman. Her “consciousness of collective oppression” engenders “the will to act” and motivates her to register to vote as an American citizen (Evans 133).

Her name, Rosaleen Daise, was written twenty five times at least down the page in large, careful cursive, like the first paper you turn in when school starts. "This is my practice sheet," she said. "For the Fourth of July they're holding a voters' rally at the colored church. I'm registering myself to vote." (*The Secret Life of Bees* 27)

Despite Rosaleen’s awareness of the risks of her decision which is highlighted in the news in segments such as “a man in Mississippi was killed for registering to vote,” she remains intransigent and holds onto her decision to vote (*The Secret Life of Bees* 27). Rosaleen’s courage is an example of the values on which the Civil Rights movement was built. Sara Evans notes that despite the depth and passivity beaten into generations of rural black people, the movement was further nourished by the courage of people who dared to face the loss of their livelihoods and their lives (65). In another depiction of Rosaleen’s courage, Lily describes it as the fist of the black Mary statue in the three sisters’ house: “Rosaleen reminded me of the statue of Our Lady in the parlor” (*The Secret Life of Bees* 182). Rosaleen’s courage and “fire” motivate her actions to resist racial segregation in her town.

Lily also performs acts of resistance. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, she resorts to an isolated spot in the orchard where she buries the belongings of her deceased mother. Thus, Lily escapes from her father’s gaze.

For two years now I'd kept these things of hers inside a tin box, buried in the orchard. There was a special place out there in the long tunnel of trees no one knew about, not even Rosaleen. I'd started going there before I could tie my shoelaces. At first it was just a spot to hide from T. Ray and his meanness or from the memory of that afternoon when the gun went off, but later I would slip out there, sometimes after T. Ray had gone to bed, just to lie under the trees and be peaceful. It was my plot of earth, my cubbyhole. (*The Secret Life of Bees* 14)

The isolation in the orchard becomes a resistance to the effects of an abusive father and the childhood trauma of her mother's death. Lily also uses this method of isolation and flight when she travels to Tiburon with Rosaleen in order to find information about her deceased mother.

Suddenly I stood still. *Tiburon, South Carolina*. Of course. The town written on the back of the black Mary picture. Hadn't I been planning to go there one of these days? It made such perfect sense: my mother had been there. Or else she knew people there who'd cared enough to send her a nice picture of Jesus' mother. And who would ever think to look for us there? (Kid 43)

Lily resists her father's "regime of truth" and sets out to find her own truth by following the trace of her mother's memories. By escaping to Tiburon, Lily rejects the version of truth offered by her patriarchal father and escapes the disciplinary mechanisms performed by him in order to subject her to the discourses of patriarchy.

August and June also perform actions in order to challenge the discourses of power in their community. For example, June's rejection of marriage proposals is a form of resistance to the humiliation which she endures as a woman when she is jilted by her groom. Similarly, August abstains from marriage in order to preserve her freedom. Her motivation for this act of resistance stems from her awareness of the subjection of black women within the institution of marriage during this period. August's views on marriage are an outcome of the discourse of freedom which accompanied the Civil Rights movement. Her decision is an act of agency which aims to resist the institution of marriage and its limitation of women's freedom.

Through hobbies, the female characters further challenge the various power discourses. For example, reading, writing, and playing music are used by Lily, August, and June as forms of resistance in their community. Both August and Lily resort to reading and self-education so that they can deal emotionally and intellectually with racial and gender oppression. For instance, August's reading habit, which she develops since childhood, helps her gain financial independence when she works as a history teacher and later as a successful beekeeper. Similarly, Lily develops the same passion for reading from a young age. The encouragement of her English teacher who lends her books over the summer contributes to the development of Lily's reading passion as well. For Lily, reading offers a discourse which liberates her from the patriarchy of T. Ray and the inner struggle which resulted from her childhood trauma. Lily also writes notes and letters to her father to express her disagreement with his rules, regulations, and discourse. In addition, she writes stories in which she challenges the racial segregation of her town. Through writing, Lily creates a counter-discourse to the segregationist and patriarchal discourses of her community. She replaces the discourses of racism and gender oppression with discourses of racial integration and female empowerment. Rosaleen also uses writing as a

method of resistance. She perfects her font by writing her name repeatedly on a piece of paper, so that she does not give her oppressors a chance to deprive her of registering to vote. In this situation, the relationship between knowledge and power reveals itself because reading and writing as forms of knowledge enable August, Lily, and Rosaleen to resist discourses in their community.

Religion is also used by the female characters in the novel as a form of resistance. Rosaleen creates her own version of religion as a way of resisting the rituals of conventional religion. In Rosaleen's religion, the picture of her mother replaces the picture of the Virgin Mary and the elements of earth on the shelf represent her bonding with mother earth. Rosaleen's mother represents the god who "looks like her" (*The Secret Life of Bees* 141). Like Rosaleen, the three sisters also use religion as resistance by forming the "Daughters of Mary" group. Group members gather in a circle to glorify the Black Mary or the Lady of Chains. The color of the Black Mary statue plays an integral role in the context of the novel. Penny Barham explains that black has been seen as a metaphor for the earth with her dark soil and healing and restorative powers (328). Therefore, the daughters of Mary find in the black Mary a healing method for the pain caused by their racial oppression. In addition, the meetings of the Daughters of Mary group become social spaces within which members can develop a sense of self-worth (Evans 219). The black Mary heals Lily: "Standing there, I loved myself and I hated myself. That's what the black Mary did to me, made me feel my glory and my shame at the same time" (*The Secret Life of Bees* 71). During her encounter with the black Mary, Lily experiences attributes which are related to the history of black Mary statues. Across history, the statues have been seen to possess hermetic knowledge and wisdom which are rooted in the Earth (Barham 329). Furthermore, the story of the black Mary is an example of how "miracle stories" play an integral role in the novel

(Randal 830). The story of the black Mary statue's role in the empowerment of the black slaves is used by the daughters of Mary as a method of empowering themselves against the oppression inflicted on them by race, marriage, or family. Lillian Comas-Diaz notes that the black Madonna is considered a source of justice, empowerment, reconciliation, and liberation; she promotes resilience in the struggle against sexism, oppression, racism, and materialism; and her dark presence represents the inner strength and power of transformation of the oppressed (6; 17). Therefore, the black Mary carving in the three sisters' house becomes the source of their strength and resistance against the oppression of the different institutions in their society. By replacing their real and divine mother figures with the black Mary, the Daughters of Mary subvert the religious discourses which subjugate them.

Sisterhood enables the female characters to defend their individuality and dignity. In the novel, the characters develop a network of friendship through which they re-interpret social relations (Evans 215). Lily, for example, enjoys the safety net of sisterhood during her stay in the pink house and calls it "a dream world." She also finds the support and strength she needs during her journey of exploring the reality of her mother's death. She finds in the sisters' house "a free space" in which she can examine the nature of her own oppression and share the growing knowledge that she is not alone (Evans 215). This is further shown when the Daughters persuade T. Ray to allow Lily to continue living with the three sisters in the pink house. When the Daughters of Mary resist Lily's father and another character Otis's display of masculinity, they seek to resist those who represent oppressive institutions.

Dreaming is another method of resistance for the female characters. Throughout the novel, Rosaleen and Lily experience dreams which symbolize their inner conflict and struggle for liberation. In Lily's dreams, she sees her mother while in her daydreams she imagines a

reality without racial segregation. On the other hand, Rosaleen sees the historical figure Martin Luther King in her dreams. In both situations, each character dreams about her inner guide who acts as a source of strength and support. The inner guide is a form of compassion and wisdom and can be a historical figure or a regular person or an ancestor or an animal (Comas-Díaz 12). Because of Lily's inner struggle to find the truth about the death of her mother, she dreams of her mother as her inner guide who supports her and leads her actions in the novel. Kidd emphasizes this point when she admits her replacement of Lily's mother with the black Mary as a powerful symbolic essence that could take residence inside of Lily and become a catalyst in her transformation (*A Penguin Readers Guide* 10). For Rosaleen, Martin Luther King's presence in her dreams signifies her preoccupation with racial segregation. Therefore, dreams resist the characters' insecurities caused by racial and familial struggles.

The female characters use entrepreneurship in productive ways. By starting a product brand name, the three sisters achieve financial independence and autonomy which relieves them from working as housewives for white households. This financial autonomy resists the discourse of the economic inferiority of the blacks in the south. The honey business becomes the economic backbone of the empowerment of the female characters. Their fame and skill in honey making becomes their point of strength as colored women. Thus, the sisters create an alternative discourse which emphasizes the autonomy and strength of black women and subverts the Southern religious and patriarchal discourses.

Confrontation takes place as a response to the newfound sense of self of the female characters in the novel (Evans 215). For example, Lily confronts her father in order to defy the discourse of secrecy and humiliation which clashes with her sense of self developed by her reading and writing habits. She rejects the discourse which both belittles her mother and

encourages T. Ray to physically abuse her. Likewise, Rosaleen confronts her white oppressors and refuses their discourse of racial segregation and gender oppression. For example, she proudly publicizes her intention to register to vote to challenge racial segregation in the South. She also confronts T. Ray to defend and support Lily. In this way, Rosaleen and Lily defy the forms of power that oppress them. For both Lily and Rosaleen, the confrontation results in the physical abuse of both characters. However, eventually, Lily succeeds in gaining her independence and defying the patriarchy of her father and Rosaleen succeeds in registering to vote and defying the racial oppression of her community.

The interchange between the discourses of knowledge and the power relations in Kidd's novel affects the female characters and highlights the roles played by discourses of power. For example, sexist and racial discourses are maintained by the family, law, media, and institution of marriage. However, the female characters in the novel resist the dominant discourses of the different institutions through religion, friendships, dreams, and entrepreneurship. Their resistance results in success and they become able to defy patriarchal, racial, and financial oppression in the south. By the end of the novel, each female character faces her source of oppression and finds peace when she achieves her purpose of gaining independence, finding the truth, discovering the source of inner strength or voting. By empowering her female characters in the novel, Kidd takes the advice of August who visited her in a dream and eventually lets Lily stay with her "mothers" (*A Penguin Readers Guide* 12).



## Conclusion

The examination of the two novels *Zaat* and *The Secret Life of Bees* in light of Foucault's theory on the relationship between power and knowledge and its effect on the construction of the individual illuminates different patterns of behavior. For example, Zaat suffers from the patriarchy of the institutions of the family and marriage which oppress her and limit her educational and professional opportunities. As a result, she finds herself under the control of her mother and husband Abdel Maguid. Similarly, Samiha, her neighbor, suffers from the domestic abuse of her husband El Shanqeety. These different types of oppression reenact the role of the central tower gaze in a Panopticon prison system. They subordinate the female characters to the norms of the family and the institution of marriage. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily suffers from the patriarchy and domestic abuse of her father T. Ray and Rosaleen is mistreated by her drunken husband. The institution of marriage also oppresses June when she is jilted by the groom. These men represent the family and institution of marriage and are transformed into patriarchal figures. Likewise, Abdel Maguid, El Shanqeety, and Zaat's mother perpetuate the patriarchy of their institutions of power. Their abuse of their daughters or wives is interconnected with the religious and patriarchal power discourses to which they are exposed in the media, religion, and society.

The media, as a source of knowledge, plays an integral role in the subjugation of the female characters in both novels. In *Zaat*, the patriarchal religious discourses in the media encourage Abdel Maguid and El Shanqeety to oppress Zaat and Samiha. The discourses of consumerism also oppress Zaat into joining the march of demolition and construction by

renovating her bathroom and kitchen. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, the media presents the black citizen as a powerless subject who is constantly a victim, thus encouraging racial violence against Rosaleen by the white segregationists. By permeating society, the different types of discourses in the media affect the behavior of the individuals in the novel and the ability of the female characters to counter their negative effects.

Gossip and ostracization take part in the gender subjugation of Zaat and Lily as well. For example, gossip and ostracization are used by Zaat's female co-workers as a disciplinary mechanism in order to force her to adhere to the gender, economic, and religious discourses of her society. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily also suffers from the effect of the school and town gossip and exclusion which are used to highlight her deviation from the normal discourse of gender and race in her community. Because of Zaat's diffident nature, she surrenders to the effect of gossip and acts according to the expected code of behavior. She also succumbs to the discourse of consumerism so as not to be ostracized by her co-workers. On the other hand, Lily challenges the town's gossip which encourages racial segregation by living with the three bee-keeping sisters in the pink house. She also challenges the economic discourse which views blacks as economically inferior citizens by working as a bee-keeping intern for their honey business. Thus, the reaction of Zaat and Lily in response to gossip and alienation in their community varies as one of them succeeds in challenging this discourse while the other submits to it.

Both Zaat and Lily seek isolation as a method for healing their oppression. Lily finds in the orchard where she buries her mother's belongings a place for meditation and self-purification. Zaat finds in the bathroom a similar refuge where she can cry over her defeats without an audience. In addition, the orchard for Lily and the bathroom for Zaat resemble the

“wailing wall” of May. Just as May buries her sorrows in a piece of paper between the cracks of her wall of sorrow, Lily and Zaat bury their sorrows either in the orchard’s soil or in the tears of defeat. However, as Lily becomes more empowered throughout the novel, her need for isolation lessens. On the other hand, Zaat’s bathroom crying sessions increase with the accumulation of burdens on herself and her family. By isolating herself, Zaat performs a process of healing which enables her to tolerate further challenges in her life. Whether the two characters succeed or fail in countering the effects of the dominant power relations around them, they both seek isolation as a method of resistance against the different kinds of oppression.

The discourse of religion also affects the female characters’ subjectivity in both novels. While its discourse dominates the characters in *Zaat*, religion is used by the female characters in *The Secret Life of Bees* as a mechanism of resistance. For instance, Islamic discourse alters the behavior of Zaat, her female co-workers, Abdel Maguid, and El Shanqeety. This compounds the oppression of women. They become required to dress and behave in a certain way to conform to the religious concept of the “good wife.” On the other hand, Lily, Rosaleen, and the black bee-keeping sisters either manipulate the same religious discourse or use an alternative religious discourse to counter the effect of racial and gender oppression. For example, Lily convinces Brother Gerald that Rosaleen was defending religion when she spit snuff juice on the three white men’s shoes, while Rosaleen herself creates her own version of religion to challenge the rituals of conventional religion. Furthermore, the three bee-keeping sisters find in the black Mary the emotional support which they could not find in the conventional religion of the South. Thus, through religion they are able to find their inner strength and empowerment. In this way, the discourse of religious institutions plays an important role in weakening or reinforcing the sense of female empowerment.

When Zaat travels to Alexandria, she hopes to find freedom from an oppressive marriage, religious practice, and the workplace. She attempts to escape the perpetual gaze of Abdel Maguid, her co-workers, and her building and to search for her inner “Himmat” in order to complete her one true self. However, her attempts result in failure. Zaat’s failure stems from her disappointment over the miserable state of her life heroes Safiya and Aziz. On the other hand, Lily succeeds in her attempt to escape because she finds her heroes who are represented by the three bee-keeping sisters. She also finds a permanent source of inner strength in the black Mary carving. In addition, Lily finds in Rosaleen an empowered companion who motivates her to continue her journey of independence. Zaat, on the other hand, is constantly abandoned by the empowered female characters in her life. Given the importance of sisterhood in countering female oppression, Zaat does not find adequate support. If Zaat had found her former heroes, Samiha and Aziz, in the same rebellious state wherein she left them, or if she had not been abandoned by Himmat and Safiya, her fate would have been different and her resistance would have succeeded.

The outcome of entrepreneurship as a form of resistance also differs in the two novels. For instance, Zaat’s small business ventures are always doomed and fail to counter the consumerism of her society. On the other hand, the bee-keeping business of the three sisters thrives, providing them with financial stability and autonomy. Zaat’s failure in sustaining a successful business project places her under the mercy of her society. On the contrary, the success of the three sisters in managing the bee-keeping business enables them to resist their society. Therefore, the success or failure of the main characters’ entrepreneurship plays an important role in the fate of their struggle against oppression.

The outcome of each novel and the fate of each character are also different. For instance, with each confrontation, Zaat returns to the status quo. Her relapse is caused by the absence of her interior and exterior “Other” which encourages her to challenge the discourses of power in her society. In contrast, Lily’s confrontations prove successful due to the presence of Rosaleen, the three bee-keeping sisters, and the Daughters of Mary group. Lily finds in those figures the heroes who are absent from the life of Zaat. Unlike Himmat, Samiha, and Safiya who abandon Zaat at one point or another in the novel, the empowered female figures in *The Secret Life of Bees* do not abandon Lily and provide her with emotional and financial support. Thus, the presence of empowered female figures by the side of the main female character supports her resistance.

Another source of support for the female characters in both novels is dreams. In Zaat’s dreams, she seeks emotional support from her father, Egypt’s political leaders, and the rebellious individuals she encounters in her life. Occasionally, these dream figures succeed in motivating Zaat to counter the challenges she faces in her society. For example, without the appearance of presidents demolishing the old bathroom in her dreams, Zaat would not have been able to successfully renovate her bathroom and kitchen. Furthermore, Aziz’s appearance in Zaat’s dreams motivates her to travel to Alexandria in an attempt to find her rebellious self to help her counter the challenges of her marriage and workplace. On the other hand, in their dreams, Lily sees her mother and Rosaleen sees Martin Luther King. Both dream characters are a manifestation of the journey of each character. Rosaleen’s wish to vote and Lily’s wish to find out the truth about her mother’s death seep into their dreams. Like Zaat, the dream figures become a source of motivation for Lily and Rosaleen, providing them with the emotional support

they need to pursue their life quests. Thus, dreams are a source of inner strength and empowerment for the female characters.

The female characters in both novels choose to respond in different ways to their oppression. However, the outcome of their resistance depends on the emotional and financial support which they possess or lack in both novels. Lily succeeds in countering the patriarchy of T. Ray, while, Zaat, in spite of her occasional outbursts of resistance, fails to gain independence and financial autonomy. The absence of Himmat, Safiya, Aziz, and Samiha from Zaat's life increases her vulnerability and leads to her eventual surrender to the dominant power discourses of gender, consumerism, corruption, and religion in her society. Unlike Lily, Zaat fails to find her pink house and community.

The authorship controversy is another point of interest in the analysis of the two novels. In *Zaat*, Sonallah Ibrahim is a male author who is writing about female characters. He attempts to depict their feelings, dreams, aspirations and ambitions. However, he maintains a certain distance from his female characters. The distance enables him to use his own voice and interact with the events in the life of his female characters as an observer. His choice of a female protagonist symbolizes a need for displaying a human element which is crushed under the reality of deteriorations in society. As a female character in a patriarchal, economically challenged society, Zaat emerges as the ideal candidate. On the other hand, Sue Monk Kidd in *The Secret Life of Bees* is a white author who writes a novel about black characters. Her interaction and familiarity with black female characters during her adolescence has left her with a state of realization of the racial and gender injustice which has prevailed during that period. Therefore, her authorship as a white author who writes on black characters becomes a form of internal reconciliation towards this feeling of injustice. Therefore, both authors, in spite of their

difference in sex and race from their characters, seek to connect their readers with the political, historical, economic, religious and social reality of the two novels by choosing subjugated groups which suffer directly from the dominant power relations in this social reality.

The outcome of each character's resistance depends on the larger context of the work. Sonallah Ibrahim finds in the surrender of Zaat a symbol for the surrender of a whole country. As a witness to the deteriorating political, social, and economic situation in Egypt, Ibrahim creates a female character that is influenced by the effects of those different types of deterioration. The relapse of Egyptian society influences Ibrahim and leads him to write *Zaat* as a novel of failure. Like their society, the status of the female characters in the novel worsens over time. They become mirrors of their community and, as their community fails, so do the female characters. On the other hand, *The Secret Life of Bees* traces the emancipation and empowerment of women in both fiction and reality. Influenced by the success of the Civil Rights movement, Sue Monk Kidd depicts this success in the fate of the female characters of the novel. She creates a coming-of-age novel in which Lily and other female characters find inner growth as well as gender, racial, economic, and religious emancipation. Like the characters of *Zaat*, the female characters of *The Secret Life of Bees* also become mirrors of their community. They succeed in resistance because of the real-time success of the Civil Rights movement. In this way, the historical and the social reality become part of the fictional, and the female subjects in both novels are constructed by the discourses of their communities. Thus, the contrasting endings in both novels become a symbol of the authors' interaction with their reality, while the difference in the fate of the female characters stems from the effects of different political, economic, religious, racial, and historical contexts and social interactions in their communities.

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