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##### MLA Citation

Mahmoud, Safinaz Ahmed Saad. *Female subjectivity in times of constraint: a study of Naguib Mahfouz and Gabriel García Márquez*. 2015. American University in Cairo, Master's Thesis. *AUC Knowledge Fountain*. <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/1390>

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The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Female Subjectivity in Times of Constraint:  
A Study of Naguib Mahfouz and Gabriel García Márquez**

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  
**Safinaz Ahmed Saad**

Under the supervision of  
**Dr. Amy Motlagh**

**December 2015**



## **Acknowledgments**

Numerous people deserve acknowledgment for helping me complete my research on this thesis. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Amy Motlagh for her tireless efforts and patience in reviewing the countless drafts pertaining to my research, as well as Professor William Melaney for stimulating discussions and helpful encouragement. I would also like to thank Professors Stephen Nimis, Adam Talib, Ferial Ghazoul, and Tahia Abdel Nasser for their insightful comments that helped me finalize my writing.

Besides my professors, no words can describe how much I would like to thank each member of my family for their unconditional love and endless support during the time I needed to fulfil this part of my MA degree. Last but not the least, I am especially indebted to my friends, Sama and Rania, for the several discussions that helped me focus on my argument, as well as many others for their emotional support throughout this phase of my studies.

## Abstract

This study aims at examining the depiction of female characters in two postcolonial novels set in the mid-twentieth century, namely, Naguib Mahfouz's *The Beginning and the End* and Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of the silent female subaltern poses a challenge to reading the (hi)story of any female character when the narrator assumes a dominant role in the literary narrative. Research in this thesis extends Spivak's dichotomy of silence and speech to accommodate a middle ground that allows us read the characters' presence as speaking voices of their (hi)stories. While Spivak is interested in how Western feminists approach to third-world woman, this work offers a variation on this inquiry, asking whether it is possible for third-world women in their fictional writings to retain limited autonomy, while constraints are nonetheless imposed on them by male narrators. Specifically, I ask if it is possible for Mahfouz and Márquez to represent the female subaltern without fully sustaining a patriarchal perspective in both literary works. This examination concludes that both male authors succeed at providing Nefisa and Angela, main female figures, with a limited subjectivity that gives voice to the often marginalized in the history of postcolonial worlds, and reflects the limitations of their societies' convictions towards woman.

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## **Introduction. Can The Subaltern Speak?**

Naguib Mahfouz and Gabriel García Márquez are two prolific Third World writers from countries continents apart: Egypt and Colombia. Besides the local acknowledgment of their ingenuity in their countries of origin, both writers have been internationally recognized for their ability to depict sensitively complex and at times controversial aspects of their societies, which are often perceived as strongly patriarchal and “traditional” cultures. This makes their stories and their characters of special interest, specifically their depiction of female heroes. In countries where woman’s position in society often appears to be marginal, both authors emphasize the role of their main female figures in the plots of novels set in the mid-twentieth century: Mahfouz’s *The Beginning and the End* and García Márquez’s *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Both works present indigenous female characters who are not simply oppressed by their social constraints, but rather are dynamic, rounded characters who make significant choices in spite of a mid-twentieth-century public sphere wherein women were often constrained by factors beyond their control.

Critic Gayatri Spivak’s famous theory of the silent subaltern poses a challenge to any reading of the main female characters of these authors. Specifically, it raises the question of whether these characters (created by male authors) have a (hi)story that they can tell in their own voices. This thesis aims at exploring Spivak’s question “Can the subaltern speak?” within the frames of both novels. In her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak argues that the production of history by Western intellectuals is influenced by the “desire to conserve the subject of the West”, specifically in creating the history of the Third World / colonized other (*Colonial Discourse* 66). She problematizes Western discourse about the former colonized world for being self-centered, arguing that its “objective” research does not truly represent the history of the

Colonial other, but rather a version of history that serves the interests of the colonial power. Criticizing the ignorance of major Western theorists like Foucault and Deleuze, Spivak argues that research and knowledge served as justification to conquer subjugated cultures through the project of colonialism (*Colonial Discourse* 84). Therefore, epistemic violence, which is the process of forcing a certain type of knowledge on the colonial other that does not necessarily represent that other, serves the economic and political benefits of the West in the colonized regions.

Furthermore, Spivak criticizes the imperialist desire to create a subject of the Third World by drawing attention to its alterity. Thus, imperialist discourse does not serve to register the colonial other as an independent being that possess its own characteristics, but rather affirms the idea of it as that which “constitute[s] the colonial subject as Other” (*Colonial Discourse* 76). This type of discourse, Spivak argues, creates the Western subject as opposed to the Third World other. Spivak argues that the spread of such a discourse poses a serious problem in the process of creating history because this other’s direct voice is typically absent from the text. As she is engaging with the “retelling and ethically and imaginatively inhabiting other people’s narratives,” Spivak is concerned with the possibility of this other to represent (speak) its own experience and history (Rae 118). She argues that the other speaks only if it is able to correct falsified and politically imposed versions of history by providing its own, while being heard. When Spivak speaks about the other, she means the “general non-specialist, nonacademic population across the class spectrum”; more specifically, she is concerned with the marginalized among those others, or *subalterns* (*Colonial Discourse* 78).

Spivak is not the only theorist to deploy the term “subaltern”. Though “subaltern” in the Oxford dictionary is defined as a junior officer in the British army or in general a person of lower



status, earlier in the twentieth century, Antonio Gramsci used the term to a different purpose: to indicate the group in society that is dominated by the elite or the ruling class, as Spivak notes, he “used the word to stand in for ‘proletarian’” (“The New Subaltern” 324). In the 1980s, the Subaltern Studies movement in India used the term “subaltern” with reference to the peasantry. This movement was concerned with rewriting “Indian colonial historiography from the perspective of the . . . peasant insurgencies during the colonial occupation” (*Colonial Discourse* 79). Spivak, however, defines the subaltern as the marginalized (the silenced center) who does not have enough evidence to represent its history, “men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban sub proletariat” (*Colonial Discourse* 78). Spivak gives the term a categorical meaning that is founded on a relational basis, wherein the subaltern occupies an inferior relation to a superior counterpart.

Moreover, Spivak says, “clearly, if [a person is] poor . . . [and] female”, one is doubly marginalized as a subaltern whose “construction of consciousness or subject becomes most problematic” (*Colonial Discourse* 90). She singles out the female of the Third World, hegemonized by social and political elements, as a crucial example of the subaltern. Furthermore, Spivak argues that the dominant Western feminist attitude towards the non-Western woman demonstrates its complicity in an imperialist project that aims to save the less developed world, which serves its own agenda. In an article entitled, “French Feminism in an International Frame”, Spivak criticizes Western feminist discourse as ethnocentric, as it creates a homogenous image of an oppressed Third World woman and neglects the various specific historical, political, social, and cultural conditions that shape woman’s position. Spivak adds that Western feminist intellectuals’ projection of their own struggles onto non-Western women leads to a failure in understanding the real struggle of Third World women. She criticizes specifically

how they view the expression of female sexuality in the Third World. She cautions against the “valorization of woman’s non-reproductive sexual pleasure in French feminist thought [as] an effective” tool of resistance among Third-World women (Morton 83). Spivak asserts that what is often presented in the West as a “universal” feminist discourse is in fact a fundamentally Western movement with different concerns than indigenous feminist movements in the Third World, which tend to be focused on basic conditions of survival, the right to education, employment, and social respect as an equal to a male. For her, the female sexual repression in the Third World that she sees as the focus of French feminists’ attention to Third World women is beside the point.

Spivak makes the silenced female subaltern the main locus of her argument. She is occupied with whether or not the female as subaltern can speak within structures of history and literature. Her arguments center on the subordination of women and the conditions through which a subaltern subject *cannot* speak. Spivak’s principle aim is to emphasize that in order to truly represent herself “woman must learn to speak . . . make audible [what] . . . suffers silently in the holes of discourse” (“French Feminism” 165). Spivak adds that besides the misrepresentation of the Third World woman in Western feminist discourse, the “ideological construction of gender [in this same discourse] keeps the male dominant” in targeted social structures (*Colonial Discourse* 82). She adds that the effect of this construction as fundamentally patriarchal silences the female by either active omission or by ventriloquizing her voice. Thus, the subaltern female’s representation conveys the teller’s vision rather than the real version of the story. Furthermore, Spivak argues that even if the female subaltern speaks, her speech act is not complete unless it is heard by others in order to correct falsified historical views of the female subject. Moreover, she argues that the intellectual (Western or otherwise) who attempts to speak

“for” the female subaltern does not solve the problem of audibility for two reasons: one, the actual voice of the subaltern is missing; two, it is still a representation from his/her perspective, which makes whatever figure they establish two steps removed from the real voice of the subaltern. She maintains, “the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak [their] exploitation even if the . . . [well-meaning] intellectual make[s] space for her to speak . . . Woman is doubly in shadow” (*Colonial Discourse* 84). Spivak concludes that since woman cannot tell her own story—and even when she speaks she is not heard—the subaltern as female has “no history and cannot speak” (*Colonial Discourse* 83).

My thesis examines the ways in which we can extend Spivak’s recognition of the denial of speech to the female subaltern in two third-world novels. Spivak’s theory of the female subaltern presents a rigid dichotomy between speech and silence, which helps explain why the subaltern cannot speak. This theory seems to foreclose the possibility of a space in which the female subaltern can represent herself. Exploring Spivak’s theory in terms of literature, it becomes difficult to understand the female protagonist’s voice as truly belonging to her; rather, it seems always to belong to a (male) author. While one might imagine, following Spivak’s line of thought, if we can hear the voice of consciousness of the subaltern—especially if this voice seems to tell a different understanding of their patriarchal constructed stereotypical image in the society—then the subaltern subject is capable of speaking. Spivak, however, would argue otherwise.

My contribution to this debate is to identify two forms of speech in both novels—the literal and the metaphorical—which in fact enable the subaltern to speak in these two novels. *Literal* speech can be found in the dialogues of the main female characters with other characters, as well as their interior and exterior monologues, which express thoughts and feelings.

*Metaphorical* speech includes performances or actions based on personal motivations that propel the plot of the novel. These kinds of speech enable representation that gives each character a dynamic personality and hence a voice that suggests underlying motivations. My argument therefore is that having both forms of speech enables us to understand the main female characters not merely as subalterns, but as vital characters in these plots.

While Mahfouz's representation of characters depends greatly on interior monologue and an omniscient narrator for the description of events, García Márquez's portrayal rests, largely, on the voice of a first-person narrator who chronicles in a journalistic interrogative style events and characters. Despite the difference in narrative style, both novels present two women in difficult situations and the choices they make within the confines of their societies. While these women are not the protagonists of the novels, they are important characters without whom the novels would not exist. A challenge to my argument concerning the significance of these female characters' speech, Spivak might assert, is the fact that these female characters are the creation of male authors who, no matter how well intentioned in presenting their heroines, are still not female subalterns themselves. Therefore, the authors are bound to produce a perspective on women that supports patriarchy. Following Spivak's point of view, the female voice is apt to be ventriloquized and consequently silenced. However, we cannot simply dismiss the characters' stories on this basis (ventriloquism). Instead, it leads us into a discussion of representation; specifically, the paradox of authorial voice versus fictional character autonomy. In other words, we need to consider how any character's autonomy can be asserted within an entirely authorial construction.

This is a subject with a long history, but for the sake of the discussion here, I am interested in two mainstream arguments pertaining to this discourse. On the one hand, some

critics support the opposition between authorial voice and character autonomy, in which the novel is a fiction created by an author who has sole control over characters and plot. Among them we find Frank Kermode arguing in *The Sense of an Ending*, that the novel's characters might "have their choices," but their development, past and future are determined by the project of the author (140). This position echoes Spivak's notion of the silent subaltern, whose voice is ventriloquized by the author, specifically the male author. On the other hand, there are critics who read the novel as a product that exceeds authorial intentions. Peter J. Rabinowitz's notion of the reader's double consciousness provides a good example of this discussion. He suggests a mode of reading with "double consciousness" in which we need to believe in the autonomy of the characters without forgetting that it is an illusion in order to understand the author's project, as well as what is beyond his/her intentions (126-127). This latter reading supports my extension of Spivak's argument to include a middle ground between silence and speech in which female characters represented by male authors can have the space from which they can tell stories despite the masculinist point of view. We must acknowledge that the novel is a creation of its author as much as it is an assembly of narratives. However, looking at a character as simply the mouthpiece of the author (or ventriloquized voice of the author) not only silences other interpretations, but also erases the characters' history and closes out the imaginary and the creative element in fiction. Employing both levels of understanding allows us to read the text from different perspectives in which the author's point of view cannot be separated from the reading of the characters' representation, but is not limited to it.

There is no doubt that the women depicted in both novels reflect their authors' critical stance on social values; specifically, problems associated with the expression of female sexuality in Arab and Latin American societies. While Spivak might criticize this approach for being,

essentially, in the voice of the male author, we should not forget that Mahfouz and García Márquez wrote at a time when any woman was considered a second-class citizen in terms of access to education, respectable employment opportunities, or personal status. The act of presenting Nefisa and Angela, women who belong to lower social strata, as active characters and allowing them to represent themselves through their own feelings and thoughts within restrictive social traditions must be seen as transgressive at their historical moments. Both authors provide these female characters with a limited autonomy by giving them opportunities within the literary works to act, speak, or remain silent. In addition, rather than depicting their female characters as revolutionaries fighting against their own societies, these authors present them as expressing opinions or thoughts that reveal an understanding of their societies, which adds to their credibility.

The understanding of the stories of female characters in both novels requires an awareness of the function of the code of honor related to female sexuality in Arab and Latin American societies. In *The Beginning and the End*, Mahfouz depicts Nefisa as the only person who can provide steady financial assistance to her family after the death of her father through turning her dressmaking hobby into a moderately profitable profession. The narrator presents how Nefisa feels and thinks about the fall of her family into a lower social class and the necessity of taking a job outside the home, which is an affront to middle-class values and ideas of femininity. Without the protection of a father and with brothers unable or unwilling to help her find a husband, Nefisa attempts to do so herself, and in consequence, enters into a physical relationship with someone of inferior social status (Soliman, the grocer's son). When the latter forsakes her in order to marry the bride chosen by his family, Nefisa is heartbroken and feels

betrayed; nonetheless, she cannot give up her sexuality, and finds herself entering into numerous sexual relationships that lead to an existential crisis.

Nefisa's actions bring into relief the social code of honor as related to sexuality in Egyptian society in the mid-twentieth century. In *Egypt as a Woman*, Beth Baron states that family honor in an Arab family rests primarily on the sexual behavior of its women. Female chastity is an unquestioned virtue, so that any prenuptial affair that leads to loss of virginity, the symbol of virtue, or extramarital relations "carr[ies] a heavy price" (*Egypt as a Woman* 41). The code of honor is supported by the patriarchal structure that sees honor as a collective family issue. Any transgression of the code on behalf of sexuality dishonors the family and tarnishes its reputation (metaphorically the family blood) and has to be redeemed by punishing the transgressor. The transgressor in the Egyptian context is the woman who, in some cases, loses her life as a consequence.

Mahfouz presents the decline of the family's honor in *The Beginning and the End* as not only resulting from Nefisa's behavior, but also from Hasan's, her brother, shameful ways of earning his living—i.e., through theft, smuggling, and drug dealing. In some ways, their degradation is presented in parallel. However, there is no doubt that issues related to female sexual behavior are perceived as more scandalous than Hasan's licentious lifestyle. This is seen in the different reactions each conduct provokes. While Hasan's life incites anger in, the youngest brother, Hassanein's heart and pity in their mother's, Nefisa's promiscuous behavior leads to her suicide and is followed by Hassanein's death. Nonetheless, despite exhibiting the importance of the social code of honor from the novel's outset, Nefisa's choices throughout the novel do not give the code much consideration. Her thoughts and feelings acknowledge its

importance as she visualizes how her family would react at discovering her sexual practices, but this does not seem to stop her from doing what she wants.

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, García Márquez presents Angela, a young woman who is returned to her parents' house on her wedding night as soon as her husband discovers that she is not a virgin. Although we are not shown the circumstances of her transgression, a perpetrator, Santiago Nasar, is named and consequently murdered by Angela's twin brothers as the one responsible for violating social rules. Although her characterization is in some ways incomplete, the narrator presents Angela in later life as a fully conscious person who narrates her past and present with an openness that is unusual among the other inhabitants of the town where the crime took place. Angela's actions reflect on the culture and sexual code of honor in mid-twentieth century Colombia, which is a loyal heir to the Spanish colonizer's cultural traditions and values. In her article on Latin American women, Nora Kinzer says that in the macho society of Latin America, while men's infidelity is tolerated and seen as confirmation of virility, a woman is expected to remain a virgin before marriage and to adhere to chastity after it. A woman's honor throughout her life depends on her ability to preserve her chastity. Sometimes, as in this case, grooms return their brides upon the discovery of her failure to abide by the rules (Kinzer 302). In general, any violation to this code of honor is considered a violation to the society's peaceful order which—as in Egypt—can only be corrected by getting rid of the transgressors. However, whereas in Egypt the woman is seen as the primary transgressor, in Latin American society, the man is often perceived as the transgressor, although the woman is also culpable (Schoenherr 21).

In conclusion, One cannot deny that Spivak's subaltern theory opens up an innovative methodology to examine the female characterization in third-world literature. It paves the way to see the position of woman in society within its limitation. In the next two chapters, I start from



Spivak's notion of the silent subaltern and extend it to explore how the male authors offer an alternative understanding of their main female figures and their speech within the confinements of their societies.

## Chapter One.

In her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak maintains that “the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant . . . the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (*Colonial Discourse* 82). Thus, Spivak concludes that the woman as subaltern can never speak “the testimony of [her own] voice consciousness” as long as her voice is unheard or remains distorted by stereotypical representation of interested parties that serve the patriarchal ideology (*Colonial Discourse* 93). In light of Spivak’s argument, if we look at Naguib Mahfouz’s *the Beginning and the End* and its female character, Nefisa, and her peers, Bahya and the nameless daughter of Ahmed Bek Yousri, we can discern a pattern wherein the author offers different figures of the female subaltern. While completely ignoring the voice of the daughter of Ahmed Bek Yousri, Nefisa’s and Bahya’s character development is given significant space in *The Beginning and the End*; and yet, although they both “speak” (in the literal sense of displaying dialogue in the novel), only Nefisa’s inner voice—what we might call her consciousness—can be heard. I will start with the analysis of Nefisa, the female character who is given the most attention in its narrative.

Although Nefisa might seem outwardly silent as she rarely shares her views with other characters in the novel, her interior monologues are important throughout the narrative, providing a clear window through which readers can reflect on her conscious thoughts and development. Seen through Spivak’s argument of the subaltern’s ventriloquized voice, Nefisa seems to adopt her society’s patriarchal views regarding some aspects of her life, her physical appearance, her job as a dressmaker, and her desire for marriage as a solution to all of her problems. However, at the same time, the reader is invited to see Nefisa’s transgressions of the

social order and her reflections on her acts as ways in which she attempts to assert herself within the limits of her world.

Nefisa's subaltern state is depicted from the outset of the narrative; she is subordinate in gender, social status, and physical appearance in relation to her peers in society:

“Nefisa . . . was an adequate replica of what [her mother] once had been. Nefisa, too, had the same thin oval face, short, coarse nose and pointed chin. She was pale, and a little hunchbacked. She differed from her mother only in her height; she was as tall as her brother Hassanein. She was far from handsome, indeed almost ugly. It was her misfortune to resemble her mother” (Mahfouz 19/28-29).<sup>1</sup>

Nefisa's physical appearance revives her mother's youthful figure, and suggests that she is destined to recreate the unfortunate life of her mother, who sacrificed her life to family and denied herself any joy. As Al Ashmawi explains, Nefisa epitomizes the traditional obedient daughter who does not object when she is taken out of school and remains at home, learning sewing in preparation for becoming a housewife and waiting for a suitor to arrive (86).<sup>2</sup> She does not outwardly reveal any revolutionary tendencies. However, Nefisa's homely appearance, which is acknowledged by herself and her family, is an obstacle to her taking on the role of wife in a society that values a woman for her physical appearance or wealth. Her mother “agoniz[es] over her condition, a girl of twenty-three, without beauty, money, or father” (Mahfouz 19/28-29) and her brother Hussein evokes her memory during his stay in Tanta by “recall[ing] her ugly face” (Mahfouz 213/222).

Her homely appearance is a flaw that makes her unmarriageable, thus guaranteeing her, within the society's logic, a miserable future. The family's negative estimation of Nefisa is echoed in her own self-image and self-worth. She derived a sense of her self-worth from her late

father's authority as a government employee while he was still alive. Subsequently, we hear how she consciously evaluates herself as an invalid due to her lack of beauty or wealth. She repeatedly affirms, "I have no beauty, no money, and no father" and "I am terribly lonely, desperate, and suffering" (Mahfouz 53/64).

Moreover, Nefisa does not object to her mother's idea that she starts receiving monetary compensation for sewing rather than doing it only as a hobby. Although she takes the job to help her family, she fails to see it as an honorable source of income and instead views her job as socially degrading. In her discussion of the Egyptian woman's movements in the early twentieth century, Beth Baron mentions that women's paid employment was overall a mark of low status, and any job "was far from being a sign of good status for privileged women" (*The Women's Awakening*, Baron 147). Nefisa exemplifies the feeling of shame due to the class degradation that her father's death forces upon her, which makes her a tool of the patriarchal system even as it precludes her from enjoying its rewards (e.g., marriage).

Nefisa's brother, Hassanein, objects to her working: he sharply "refuses to be a brother of a dressmaker" and her mother hates to see her "humiliated" (Mahfouz 26/ 36), but the entire family willingly accepts the fruits of her labor and indeed depends upon her income. Nefisa does not share her dissatisfaction with any of her family members, but we constantly overhear her internal monologue. When she receives her first customer, she says, "this is painful, but ... what use is there in breaking my heart over it?" (Mahfouz 54/64). Although Nefisa adopts the distorted views of her society, the clarity of her inner voice announces an interpretation of these views that poses a serious challenge to thinking of her as a silent subaltern. Here, it is worth mentioning that the notion of "honor" makes Nefisa and her family agonize at the job of seamstress, but at the same time, they do not offer any alternatives to preserve this honor.

Motivated by a drive towards marriage, Nefisa encourages the flirtatious attempts of Soliman Gaber, the grocer's son—someone who would likely be beneath her status had her father lived. Convinced that she does not have the luxury of rejecting any man and that “no body better than Soliman will ever come” (Mahfouz 79/91), the daughter of the late esteemed government clerk and the sister of educated brothers gets involved in a physical relationship with an almost illiterate man whose features betray “foolishness, bestiality and cowardice” (Mahfouz 79/91). Although we hear Nefisa's discontent at her degrading choice, Soliman's passionate interest in her, specifically his physical interest, “reassure[s] her that she [is] a woman like other women” (Mahfouz 105/115).

This is how she starts to search for her own version of happiness. Nefisa's relationship with Soliman is a challenge to her rejection by society first due to her homeliness, and then due to the death of her father. As Ghālī Shukrī contends, this relationship is an “unconscious fulfillment of [Nefisa's] existence” (*Azmat al-jins* 95).<sup>3</sup> Nefisa happily accepts his desire for her. For her, he is nothing but a man who shows her attention and puts his hand on an open wound when he admires her beauty (Shukrī, *al-Muntamī* 169).<sup>4</sup> This is why once he abandons her, he almost disappears and never appears again in the novel or in Nefisa's thoughts except for the news that her brother Hasan sang at his wedding. With Soliman, Nefisa's character acquires depth and agency. She not only thinks and desires, but she briefly acts upon her desires. In addition, the novel makes clear that Nefisa enjoys the intimacy they shared; as the narrator relates, “she remembered their lovemaking with a heat of passion” (Mahfouz 126/135). Although at this stage, Nefisa still shies away from confessing it to herself in her own interior monologues; we hear it from Soliman's playful allusions, “I still feel your heat scorching me” (Mahfouz 127/136). Nefisa not only breaks the social norm once by involving herself in a physical

relationship out of wedlock, but she continues to enjoy it until this relationship comes to a halt, when Soliman tells her that since his mother has returned from travels, they will not be able to visit the flat anymore. She exclaims to herself, “When shall I have him without fear?” (Mahfouz 126/135).

Finally acquiescing to his father’s choice of bride without any remorse or feeling of responsibility towards Nefisa, Soliman, momentarily, acquires a sense of courage and rebellion. Nefisa expresses her anger to Soliman, insults him badly, and hits him on the street. However, he denies any responsibility with a single sentence: “[Y]ou have no claims on me” (Mahfouz 142/152). cooke argues justifiably that Nefisa’s reaction “serves . . . to consolidate an unmanly man’s manliness” (120). It shows how patriarchal society allows a cowardly man to enjoy “socially sanctioned rights” for amoral conduct, while denying them to a woman (cooke 120). Returning to Spivak, this action exemplifies the claim of feminists who argue that “even the most disenfranchised man has more rights within patriarchal society than the most noble woman” (*Post-Colonial Critic* 139). Besides granting him an unwarranted manliness, Soliman gets to marry and most probably lives in peace, while Nefisa is dishonored and is considered almost dead in society’s eyes. Nefisa’s outburst at Soliman seems to return her to her subaltern position; she is powerless in the face of his male privilege.

After Soliman’s disappearance from Nefisa’s life, she suffers from “a feeling of despair” and finds herself accepting propositions from strangers on the street (Mahfouz 177/ 187). This decision has led to considerable controversy among critics concerning Nefisa’s motivations and the picture it creates of Nefisa as a female subaltern. Fawzia Al Ashmawi argues, “Although it may appear from the outside that Nefisa chose a path of moral degeneracy and deviance . . . and [allowed] herself to be led into prostitution, . . . she was not to blame. Her tragic situation was

the result of the trying social and familial circumstances that precipitated her moral decline. . . . She was a victim . . . of circumstances” (106).<sup>5</sup> Ṭāhā Wādī’s representation of Nefisa confirms that she is the “martyr of a society that turned her into a prostitute to support her family financially” (235).<sup>6</sup> Al-Ma‘dāwī joins the argument by commenting that Mahfouz’s characters in *The Beginning and the End* “cannot choose to take different paths [in life]” (785).<sup>7</sup> We cannot deny the effect of Nefisa’s dire conditions on her demeanor; however, we cannot simply attribute her conduct to her circumstances. For Mahfouz makes Nefisa articulate her state of mind in a revealing interior monologue that “guides the reader through each tiny decision” (cooke 119). Nefisa’s resolution results from a previous “violent conflict that had torn her heart” (Mahfouz 177/ 186). She is aware of her desires and makes choices based on them; she says, “I understand everything” and is fully conscious of the consequences of her actions (Mahfouz 177/ 186). Therefore, if it is possible to call her a victim, then she is also the perpetrator.

Moreover, Al Ashmawi maintains that had Nefisa’s father been alive, she might have married and lived like the rest of the girls in her class (106).<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Al-Ashmawi misses Nefisa’s interior voice, which betrays her repeatedly as she confesses her inability to contain the “intense desire boil[ing] in her veins, clamoring for gratification” (Mahfouz 178/187). Although Nefisa tries to justify her position from a patriarchal perspective saying that “[she has] nothing to lose” after she has already lost her virginity, the nature of her couplings suggest other motivations (ibid). Nefisa longs for the intimacy and warmth of a relationship with a trustworthy man that makes her feel desired. Nonetheless, she learns that there is no place in society for sexual intimacy outside marriage, so when another partner, Muhammad al-Ful offers her money at the end of their interaction, she accepts it as compensation for the lack of intimacy. However, her earnings from these couplings are too meagre to provide significant support. Despite her

feelings of guilt and fear of scandal, Nefisa does not stop “her regular visits” even after she abandons her sewing job and her family’s economic situation improves (Mahfouz 384/392). Thus, the argument that Nefisa’s behavior can be explained on a financial basis alone does not stand. Her sexual behavior goes through many stages: at first, she seeks intimacy that she cannot find in the conventional way—i.e., through marriage. Subsequently, she engages in sporadic encounters, which provide sexual gratification and becomes the secret that she enjoys keeping to herself. Indeed, Nefisa thinks she cannot “adapt to her new life at home” when her brother Hassanein acquires the means to support her, and asks her to abandon her job as a seamstress and remain with her family (Mahfouz 301/312). Cooke reasons that Nefisa “finds a level of satisfaction [from her sexual encounters] of which she could otherwise have been deprived” (122). Thus, we can clearly grasp why Nefisa does not stop but rather does “her best to gratify [her transient partners]”, in spite of the harsh treatment she receives from them (Mahfouz 182/190-1). Besides the “insane passion” that she seeks to gratify, we can understand that Nefisa maintains her meetings because they provide an escape from her boring and lonely life. She thinks that when her brother asks her to stop working that she will never be content with living her miserable “monotonous [existence], indefinitely, for death to come upon her” (Mahfouz 301/312). Thus, we see that her sexual activity, originally motivated by desire for intimacy and company, becomes an activity necessary for her psychological survival.

Commenting on some critics interpretation of Nefisa’s promiscuity, cooke maintains that “Mahfouz’s prostitutes are . . . modern women who have been exposed to new options and values and who have rebelled against traditional social expectations” (123). In contrast, in her discussion of Mahfouz’s women in the *Palace Walk* Trilogy, Hoda El Satta cites cooke and argues that although Mahfouz’s prostitutes seem as though they are rebelling against the social



order, they are “an integral part of it. In fact, their presence ensures the continuation and solidification of the Patriarchal structures” (83). One could further argue that Nefisa’s forays into numerous casual physical relationships involves a degrading reduction to object status, and suggest that Nefisa perpetuates the very thing that her kind should be rebelling against—i.e., the turning of women into sex objects by male-dominated societies. There are ways to see Nefisa’s decision to tread into casual prostitution as provoked by her acknowledgment of society’s regard for the patriarchal code of honor, which reviles the female if she indulges in sexual behavior out of wedlock. However, Mahfouz indicates that her sexual behavior has its origin in desire that needs gratification: “this desire alone would get in her way” if she tries to stop (Mahfouz 177-8/187). Therefore, I agree with Cooke that Nefisa is reacting against loneliness by indulging in something new that she enjoys— even if only momentarily. Nefisa knows that “in the market of lechery even ugliness itself is a salable commodity and pleasure seekers . . . are not fastidious in their demands . . . Marriage is a different manner. But where seeking pleasure is concerned, people are all the same” (Mahfouz 177/ 186-7).

Thereafter, the narrator also recounts that “men had given her enough pain to make her spiteful; nevertheless the flames of desire which engulfed her body were never extinguished” (Mahfouz 266/277). This allows us to relate her to the men she consorts with, whose desires are not suppressed or excluded. Describing Nefisa rather early, Mahfouz claims that “in fact, her female instinct was the only part of her that was free of blemish; it was ripe and warm” (Mahfouz 78/89). Mahfouz does not make a mystery of Nefisa’s emotional needs; neither does he philosophize about sex. He associates the term “instinct” with “female” to assure the existence of a female desire. Shukrī maintains that Mahfouz’s treatment of sex does not aim at inventing a theory, nor does he judge it positively or negatively. Rather, he presents sexual

relationships frankly as a normal and spontaneous exchange that are inseparable from other social relationships (*Azmat al-jins* 97).<sup>9</sup> It is hard to disagree, and one might even add that Mahfouz presents sex as an indispensable human need like food and air.

However, while presenting sex in this way, Mahfouz does not force on Nefisa a revolutionary character who effectively resists the values of her society. Mahfouz describes this relationship in particular in terms of its interaction with Nefisa's individual self-conception (Shukrī, *Azmat al-jins* 97).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the narration acquires a great degree of credibility. Nefisa's character, as Shukrī points out, is justly described as a "mixture of adventure and submissiveness" (*al-Muntamī* 173); in other words, her character combines submission to the realities of patriarchal society with adventures in sexual gratification. At this point, it would be useful to interrogate how critics often use the term "prostitute" to describe Nefisa's affairs. A prostitute, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is "a person, typically a woman, who engages in sexual activity for payment". However, Nefisa is not a prostitute in the classical sense of the word because she drifts into this mode of employment as she primarily seeks sexual fulfilment—probably out of emotional frustration—and the financial compensation is only an additional benefit that helps her cope with a difficult family life.

Returning to Spivak, we can perceive how Nefisa—though perhaps not the silent subaltern—nonetheless embodies certain stereotypes associated with the Third World woman. In "French Feminism in an International Frame", Spivak criticizes the ethnocentric Western feminist approach to Third World woman, which imposes Western paradigms of feminism on underdeveloped societies. Spivak believes this is a blind spot in this approach (180). Yet ironically, the attention that certain French feminists have given to woman's pleasure might be fruitfully applied to Nefisa, where pleasure (hers or her transient partners) is indeed important to

her characterization. Although Nefisa literally speaks in the narrative, she cannot express her physical desires freely because they are not consonant with the social morals and expectations of a woman of her status. This rather affirms the French feminists' view—such as Kristeva—of the Third World woman as a sexually repressed subaltern (179-80). Nonetheless, we must see how Nefisa's actions that are based on her sexual urges somehow “speak” louder than any exterior dialogue in which she might share her feelings. Of course, Nefisa does not use her sexual relationships as an active tool of resistance; she simply creates a social life that assuages her loneliness. In this way, Mahfouz presents her as a desiring, speaking woman whose actions run counter to society's narrow confines within a limited profile, as it remains, as it remains a secret until the end of the novel. When Nefisa's behavior is revealed to her brother Hassanein, Nefisa decides to silence herself forever and commit suicide. Her brother asks her whether her affair is a one-time incident or if it is a usual practice. She lies to him and says it was just once, because she knows she can never confess to him the whole truth, which is her secret. Therefore, she decides to die in order to bury the whole story altogether. Although we would find her behavior (her sexual practice and motivation) miserable and objectifying, we have to see it as transgressive in Mahfouz's mid-twentieth century without being an effective form of rebellion.

Nefisa is the only one who speaks her own feelings and thoughts among the female characters in the novel. Spivak's version of the silenced subaltern is visible in both Bahya and the daughter of Ahmed Bek Yousri. Bahya is a typical representation of a traditional Third World woman, in contrast to Nefisa. Bahya, portrayed as an extremely beautiful girl of fifteen, is the opposite of Nefisa. She possesses everything that makes a woman appealing in the Egyptian society of the period: beauty, a stable family with substantial income and a very good reputation. Like her peers, she receives education up until the “primary stage”, which is considered

sufficient to make her marriageable (Mahfouz 61/72). She does not have any exposure to the outside world and shyly avoids meeting anybody other than her family members; when she sees Hussein and Hassanein for the first time in their flat, she “retreat[s] shyly” (Mahfouz 60/71). Thanks to her family’s well-established finances, Bahya enjoys a life without pain or worry about the future. Farid Effendi, her father, “inherited a rental house in El Saida Zeinab” which adds generously to his income as a government clerk (Mahfouz 56/ 67), so unlike Nefisa, she is never forced to go outside of the home to work.

Bahya, faithfully obedient to the ideals of patriarchal society, is just a woman who “await[s] a man, any man, who might come along and marry her” (El-Sheikh 91). Thus, as soon as she faces Hassanein’s flirtations, she directly insinuates that he should officially propose to her. Hassanein seconds this in one of his interior monologues, reflecting that “[S]he wants to marry me, not love me . . . that’s why she is so frigid and reserved” (Mahfouz 318/ 329). This view is corroborated when Hassanein abandons Bahya and his brother Hussein goes directly to ask her hand in marriage. Bahya and her family accept without “previous mutual understanding, love, or even attraction” (El-Sheikh 91). Although this reserved attitude gives Bahya a positive image, it does not provide insight into her character to distinguish her from many other young women in her society.

While Nefisa’s ugliness is emphasized, Bahya’s beauty and physique are accentuated: “beautiful round face . . . white . . . adorned with eyes of purple blue”, “her shapely buttocks [that] protruded and her dress . . . [that] exposed her naked legs . . . sparkling white” (Mahfouz 56, 61/ 70, 71). Her physical beauty inspires Hassanein to possess her. The constant attention drawn to Bahya’s figure as her only merit turns her into a beautiful statue, adding to her stereotypical representation. While this novel distinguishes itself through its use of interior

monologues, Bahya is one of the characters whose interiority is never revealed in this way. She is identified with her interactions with Hassanein, who becomes her fiancé early in the novel. Despite engaging in conversations, Bahya is one of the main female characters in whom we do not “encounter the testimony of [her own] voice consciousness” (*Colonial Discourse* Spivak 93).

In one of her several attempts to repel Hassanein’s bids for sexual contact, Bahya answers negatively rather than providing any reasoning,

“[Hassanein:] But love is love, and you cannot possibly divide it up into different kinds.”  
“No, no, no. I don’t agree with that at all,” she replied . . . “I love you and I am your fiancé,” he said hopefully, “and I only want us to enjoy our love in all its purity and innocence.” A confused look appeared in her eyes . . . “I can’t,” she said. “And I don’t want that.” (Mahfouz 164/ 174).

Bahya appears here as a female character who suppresses her desire due to her confinement to social values and states, “I can’t”. This suppression of desire suppresses her voice “I don’t want”. Although Spivak thinks that various French feminists silence the Third World woman by presenting her as sexually repressed, Bahya is perhaps the perfect example of a sexually repressed female who hides her voice within this curbed desire. Thus, the French feminist’s characterization can be credited for describing the status of a typical Third World woman as Bahya in a certain social context. However, the issue in Bahya’s case is more complicated because she does not offer any personal expression as to the inevitability of this suppression.

To elaborate, Wādī asserts that Bahya’s character does not have any depth, nor is she developed (242).<sup>11</sup> Bahya seems to mirror the discourse of her surroundings as reproduced by her ideas all derive from the wireless, the magazines, and her mother. In response to Hassanein, she says, “[W]ith candor and naiveté. [Do not] you read what *Al Sabah* magazine publishes about

girls who are deserted because of their recklessness? Don't you listen to the wireless?"; "[M]y mother told me once that any girl who imitates lovers in films is a hopeless prostitute" (Mahfouz 116-117 /126). Bahya forms her opinions, which shapes her attitude towards sexuality, based on the discourse established in magazines and on the radio. She backs up the ideas from the radio as reinforced by her mother's warnings. Her character is a reflection of whatever is advocated in these sources. We do not have access to her consciousness or her own voice to know if this is what she really believes or thinks or if she is just repeating like a parrot. Her inner voice is suppressed by powerful social restrictions, or rather Mahfouz does not give us access to her thoughts. Thus, in comparison to Nefisa's activity, Bahya's monotonous voice slides into the shadows.

While Bahya is the image of a female subaltern who may have the opportunity to speak but fails to do so, the daughter of Ahmed Bek Yousri literally does not get the chance to speak; the author almost silences her voice completely. When she first appears, she is described through Hassanein's eyes as the Eve of his heaven. She possesses both beauty and breeding, which, from his perspective, make her an ideal woman. Hassanein prefers her to Bahya because his position in life has been elevated, as have his aspirations regarding a spouse. When he graduates from the military college, Hassanein is thrilled by the prospects that a union with this daughter could open for him: "to lie on top of this girl is not a sexual act, but a triumph, a conquest" over the aristocracy (Mahfouz 262/ 316).

Nevertheless, this daughter (who is never, incidentally, given a proper name) does not have a space from which she can speak or even repeat the thoughts of others. The only time she opens her mouth is during Hassanein's outburst in her father's villa after he learns of the family's rejection of his marriage proposal: "Please postpone discussing this matter until the right time"

(Mahfouz 372/ 381). We do not hear her voice—either as an interior voice, like Nefisa’s, or an externalized one, like Bahya’s. Her portrayal is so flat that it leaves the reader at a loss for imagining what she might be thinking or what she could have said. Her nomination as the daughter of a rich man serves only to indicate that the sole reason behind her appearance in the whole novel is to remind Hassanein of his inferiority. She is a peculiar variation of the Spivakian female subaltern who “has no history and cannot speak” (*Colonial Discourse* 82).

On the one hand, if the depiction of Bahya as a strong contrast to Nefisa accentuates the rigidity of the former as opposed to the dynamic existence of the latter, the daughter of Ahmed Bek Yousri cannot be considered a character in the novel as much as a symbol or a silent representative of the aristocratic class. The author ignores her voice completely as if to say that whatever she thinks or might say is irrelevant to the lives of the other women, or to her surrounding environment. Is this the case? We will never know.

Ultimately, we can see that Mahfouz as a male author is capable of expressing the subjectivity of the female character within limitations. It is true that Nefisa has enough individuality and complexity of character as revealed in her words, acts, and feelings. However, the role of the narrator in the novel monopolizes Nefisa’s direct expression of sexual desire. Nefisa alludes to the situation and discusses its details, while the narrator articulates the main motivation of Nefisa’s attitude in the second half of the novel. The near monopoly of the narrator over the direct expression of Nefisa’s sexual desires reflects the suppression of the female voice in society, but this monopoly is not complete.

Mahfouz emphasis on Nefisa’s character, rather than that of Bahya or Ahmed Bek’s daughter, implies an interest in representing disadvantaged women. His treatment of Nefisa’s main issues—her marriageability, her job as a tailor, the inevitability of her desires and their

explicit suppression— reflect his criticism of Egyptian society. Spivak might suggest that even so, Nefisa is not speaking because she is merely the mouthpiece of Mahfouz's critical views. This is true to some extent; however, we must not forget that in presenting his ideas through Nefisa, Mahfouz gives voice to the usually marginalized part of the society, a young woman who is forced to work to finance her family. Nefisa has limited agency, and is a woman of limited resources, but her fate helps us better understand the society in which she is not at home.

Mahfouz presents Nefisa in opposition to Bahya's character without favoring either over the other. Holding to the social conventions or letting go of them does not provide either of them with happiness. Mahfouz's attitude towards the characters in his novel is not clear. He criticizes by providing factual information about his characters and makes it hard for us to judge them. He may not be always sympathetic, but his approach to narrative makes us less judgmental. As we move on to the next chapter to present the most influential female characters in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, we will be able to discuss García Márquez' stance on his characters in parallel to Mahfouz's.



## Chapter Two. García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, García Márquez employs an abundance of male and female characters to tell the story of Santiago Nasar's previously announced ("foretold") murder. All of the characters, including those directly involved in the incident (Angela Vicario, Santiago Nasar, Bayardo San Román, Purísima del Carmen), are entirely described by the narrator's reported speech; however Angela is, the only character, given relatively more space for direct speech. Angela is the female character whose representation plays perhaps the most important role, as her actions are intrinsic to the main action of the novel—i.e., the murder of Santiago Nasar. The novel itself is narrated by a friend of Santiago's, who interviews other participants in the drama and offers their memories concerning the incidents surrounding Santiago Nasar's death; Angela's is one of these. Her voice is recorded by the narrator as she shares feelings and impressions she experienced before and after her brief marriage. Because the narrator is undertaking his research into the murder years after it occurred, both Angela's recollections and those of others are presented as possibly tainted by the unreliability of memory. In spite of this ambiguity, the representation of Angela's character presents another interesting study for Spivak's theory of the female subaltern. While Angela's character might seem to be only presented by the narrator, her actions in the novel attest to the presence of a peculiar voice that shapes her character. Angela is perhaps the most powerful female voice in the novel, and is therefore worthy of investigation.

Despite the narrator's domination of the narration, Angela's personality manages to develop from an ambiguous silent girl to a speaking woman whose voice communicates her distinctive character. In addition, we hear more of her version of the story than any other character associated with Santiago's murder, including Santiago himself. Here, it is important to

recall what I mentioned earlier in the Introduction about the different modes of speech (Literal and Metaphorical), as Angela's distinctive character cannot be completely illustrated with the traditional literal form of speech. Angela's distinctive character is present in her actions and, later in her interviews with the narrator, it conveys her presence and hence her voice through her speech and performance.

At the outset of her appearance in the novel, Angela seems to possess no distinctive voice. The narrator recalls his mother's description of Angela as the youngest and prettiest daughter of her family, who is brought up, like her sisters, in a way that adheres to the town's main convention for girls: to get married: "The brothers were brought up to be men. The girls had been reared to get married" (García Márquez 39/206). These two sentences follow one another in semi-parallelism, leading the reader to expect that the second will say, *the sisters had been reared to be women*. However, replacing "sisters" with "girls" and "women" with "marriage," García Márquez shows that the woman's identity is strongly tied to marriage. In other words, in this society, marriage is a crucial institution on which the woman's entire life depends. The devoted mother secures her daughter's reputation and suitability by teaching her the skills that will make her marriageable, but little else: "The girls . . . knew how to sew by machine, weave bone lace, wash and iron" (García Márquez 39/ 206).

Angela is expected to conform to this convention, and superficially, she seems to do so. Yet, she passively resists it—almost silently until her interview with the narrator. This is seen in her reaction to Bayardo's attitude at the charity bazaar and his marriage proposal. Her account is demonstrated by her direct speech supported by the narrator's recount of the details. Even as she knows that Bayardo is interested in her and tries to impress her with his "unlimited resources" by buying all the raffle tickets, Angela is not affected by his "irresistible charms" nor his wealth,

unlike her own brothers and “everybody [who] says he is enchanting” (Márquez 34/202). She does not try to attract his attention for marriage, as marriage is seemingly not one of her priorities. The narrator relates, “She confessed to me that he managed to impress her, but for reasons opposite those of love”, and Angela adds, “I detested conceited men, and I’d never seen one so stuck-up” (García Márquez 38/205). She says that she is not interested in an arrogant overly self-confident man who is not even trying to court her (García Márquez 43/209).

Angela’s attitude toward marriage is further distinguished when compared to the behavior of Flora Miguel, one of her peers. Flora occupies the space of Santiago’s fiancée. There is not much mentioned about her character except for a small amount of information provided by the narrator. She is an unmarried girl who lives in a household run strictly under the father’s instructions. Her engagement to Santiago is the result of both families’ arrangements, rather than mutual affection. Once Flora learns about Santiago and Angela’s story, she does not bother verifying Santiago’s role in the affair; she takes his charge for granted exactly like the rest of the silent townspeople. The only thing that blinds her with rage is the possibility of Angela’s family forcing Santiago to marry Angela to “give her back her honor”, which would allow her to lose the possibility of marrying Santiago (García Márquez 128/ 269). When the narrator mentions the marriage arrangement between Santiago’s and Flora’s families, he says that it is “a providential solution for her” (García Márquez 127/268).

Flora is presented as a girl who is more interested in the idea of marriage than the person or the relationship. Angela’s character, in contrast, breaks with the stereotype in her reaction signifying how she is interested first in learning about the prospective groom in order to develop mutual acceptance or affection as a basis for marriage. When Angela “hint[s] at the inconvenience of the lack of love” as the narrator mentions, her mother ignores it as Bayardo is

considered the “prize of destiny” to her relatively poor family (García Márquez 43/209). At this stage of Angela’s life, García Márquez presents her as a woman who has unconventional views but lacks the power to act on them.

Angela’s actions (metaphorical speech) are part of the testimony that illuminates her character and shapes her voice at this stage of the novel. Santiago’s murder, the main action in the novel, follows from Angela’s refusal to feign her lost virginity on her wedding night and her accusation of Santiago as the culprit. Angela’s two embroidery partners advise her not to reveal her secret and to create deception using old wives’ tricks. The ease with which they advise her suggests that they proceeded in the usual way since “almost all women lost their virginity in childhood accidents . . . and the most difficult husbands resigned themselves to anything as long as nobody knew about it” (García Márquez 47/212). This also suggests that no one truly cares about a girl’s virginity so long as any infringement of the rule is kept secret. Angela’s refusal to indulge in this trick makes her behavior stand out against the expected attitude of “almost all women” in her society (García Márquez 47/ 212). In her later interview with the narrator, we learn that Angela knows that such an attitude will most probably lead to destructive consequences, “because I’d made up my mind to die” (García Márquez 106/ 252). However, this does not dissuade her from doing what she thinks is right. She tells the narrator, “because the more I thought about it, the more I realized that it was all something dirty that shouldn’t be done to anybody” (García Márquez 105/252). Therefore, I cannot but agree with Willy Muñoz when he argues, in his article on sexuality and religion in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, that Angela’s action presents her to be a woman who is “capable of questioning and reacting dynamically against a tradition that morally damages her position as a woman” (102).<sup>12</sup>

Although we do not see much of Angela's literal speech at this stage of her development, her actions represent a metaphorical voice that presents a subjectivity distanced from society, or contrasts to women of her society like Prudencia Cotes. Prudencia is the fiancée of Pablo Vicario, Angela's brother. She appears briefly as a young girl who encourages her fiancé's plan of redeeming his familial honor by killing Santiago. Prudencia not only encourages the practice but also insists on it as a condition for their own marriage. She says, "I never would have married him if he hadn't done what a man should do" (García Márquez 74/231). There is literally no information on her except for a direct quote that announces her strong belief in the role of men in preserving the code of honor. We could easily imagine Prudencia Cotes to walk into the shoes of Angela's mother in relation to her strict views and acceptance of the patriarchal code of honor. She is ready to give up her fiancé to death or prison in order to protect the code of honor without questioning it, while, in contrast, Angela is ready to give up her own life "to die" for her personal honor (García Márquez 106/252). Despite her fears and concern for the consequences, she will not base her marriage on a lie. Angela is well aware of the established code of honor regarding female sexuality, but she does not care. Her action subverts the code instead of acknowledging its importance as Millington argues in his discussion of power and marginality in Angela's character representation ("The Unsung Heroine" 83).

Furthermore, we hear Angela expressing her opinion about the Bishop. She refuses Bayardo's suggestion to delay the wedding until the Bishop arrives so that he can marry them. She says, "The truth is I didn't want to be blessed by a man who cut off only the combs for soup and threw the rest of the rooster into the garbage" (García Márquez 48/122). She obviously finds the obsession of her village with the Bishop's visit absurd and she does not want to partake in assigning him merit that, from her point of view, he does not deserve. The narrator repeatedly

mentions the wasteful cox comb soup that is the bishop's special preference, and which requires the waste of these birds solely for their combs. García Márquez clearly offers this as a metaphor that reflects what happens to a woman once she loses her hymen—like the roosters who have lost their combs, she can simply be thrown away. Her recognition of this similarity presents an implicit criticism of the idea of evaluating women based only on their chastity prior to marriage, thus calling attention to her distinctive character and voice.

Many years after Santiago's murder, the narrator begins to visit Angela on a regular basis. On his visits, he always engages in a conversation with her about some aspect of the honor killing crime. In her analysis of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* as a tragedy of fated murder, Mary Davies asserts that Angela's attitude towards losing her chastity and her refusal to pretend otherwise destroys her family's hopes of a beneficial alliance with the wealthy Bayardo (37). In this context, it is interesting to note the difference between Angela's behavior before and after her marriage with Bayardo. At the beginning, it was her family's dream for her to marry, so she did not do anything to attain or maintain this marriage. However, she later understands that she loves Bayardo and desires his return, and she begins to write letters to him. Angela expresses her emotions towards Bayardo to the narrator: "I went crazy over him . . . out of my mind" (García Márquez 107/255). She writes two thousand letters to Bayardo over seventeen years. Thus, she initiates an action that ends in her favor. Returning with a neat bundle of two thousand unopened letters, Bayardo has come home to stay.

Angela's repeated expression of her deepest desires in letters to Bayardo "creates a new language that is not subject to the masculine culture" (Muñoz 103). She chooses to express her sexual desire and her passionate love for Bayardo in a way that is different from what women like her are taught. At a time when women were expected to suppress their feelings and desires,

these “fiancée’s notes, love documents, or feverish” expressions of passion are attest to the survival of Angela’s voice (García Márquez 107/255). Angela’s initiative of writing letters provides an instrument or a space for her (the female subaltern) to speak about her inner most feelings. It summarizes Angela’s development from a character who only expresses herself through silent actions to a developed character capable of literal speech based on dialogues with the narrator in which she reveals her feelings and thoughts. García Márquez making these letters unopened suggests that the society is unready to accept or deal with female desire or voice. This however, does not undermine the existence of this desire and its expression.

This gesture is rebellious within the context of her society—especially if we compare them to Divina Flor’s representation as a peer female character. Divina is the daughter of Victoria Guzmán, the old maid of Santiago Nasar’s household. Near the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes her as an adolescent girl who is sexually harassed by her master Santiago: “It was what he always did when he caught me alone in some corner of the house”; but we do not know how she feels about these transgressions (García Márquez 20/193). All that we can infer is that she does not hate Santiago; she leaves the door unbarred so that he can enter the house in case of emergency on the day of his murder. Divina succeeds to provide a brief account of past incidents and her mother’s choice to not warn “Santiago Nasar [of his impending murder] because in the depths of her heart she wanted them to kill him” (García Márquez 19/192). Divina’s actual situation or her own view about the past is unavailable. We are provided with no reference to any kind of character development when the narrator meets her many years after the murder took place. Although she is a minor character whose testimony might not be of big significance, her situation in the novel, as the victim of Santiago’s sexual harassment and the daughter of a sexually abused Victoria Guzmán by Santiago’s father, it would have been quite

interesting to hear something about her mindset or her story. Especially that García Márquez seems to be concerned in tackling problems pertaining to female sexuality.

García Márquez offers a final flourish of irony regarding the honor code with the return of Bayardo to Angela. Even as a fat old man, his return to the previously rejected bride, negates the importance of the code of honor that provoked Angela's rejection in the first place. In consequence, García Márquez ridicules the fatality of the murder of Santiago that weighs on the whole village's conscience. Santiago's murder is based on a code of honor, the same code that makes of Angela a rejected bride. Therefore, when Bayardo returns, Angela is no longer rejected but now accepted. Thus, the death of Santiago loses its sense/significance. The return of Bayardo together with Angela's transformation into the lover rather than the beloved is a "subversion of the norms of [the] social structure" as stated by Millington (78). Angela becomes the active member in this relationship: she initiates it and does not give up until she redeems Bayardo (Muñoz 106).<sup>13</sup> The death of Santiago, Angela's rejection by Bayardo, and her exile to another town are all punishments that re-establish the peaceful order of a society that is disturbed by a woman's transgression of the code of honor. Therefore, when Angela wins back Bayardo, she destabilizes the order that the society and her mother try to establish. This is another gesture of sarcasm by García Márquez to the code of honor.

Despite the clarity we discover in Angela's thoughts and feelings towards the end of the novel, two interconnected riddles or mysteries have not yet been solved. The first concerns the circumstances in which Angela lost her virginity in the first place; the second pertains to the reality of Santiago's complicity with Angela in an illegitimate relationship. Although the loss of Angela's virginity plays an essential role in the development of the novel, nobody around her seems interested in her experience, nor does she speak about it. Her family is appalled by the



dishonor that her loss of chastity brings upon them and her brothers act immediately to regain their honor.

In order to save the family's honor, the mother presents Angela as the victim of a sexual transgression rather than a willing partner. She wants to restore her daughter's lost honor; therefore, she puts the code of honor's system of justice in action. Millington explains the mechanism whereby the code of honor is applied, "the absence of virginity . . . creates a lack in the social fabric . . . that must be sewed up" (Millington 80). Therefore, Purísima needs "a named guilty party . . . to [be] eliminated" and to compensate the absence of virginity (Millington 80). She summons the brothers to execute the code's justice by killing Santiago. On the day of their departure from the village, she dresses Angela in shining red to deny that the daughter is in any state of mourning for the deceased lover. She persists in presenting her daughter to the public as the innocent object of an assault.

The surrounding society, taken aback by Santiago's murder and their inability to stop it, tell themselves that Angela was trying to protect "someone who really loved her and she has chosen Santiago because she thought her brothers would never dare go up against him" (García Márquez 104/252). The only one who asks Angela about what the truth of the situation is the narrator, who attempts to collect the town's memories of the murder, but Angela does not budge. She repeats what she claimed in the past—i.e., that Santiago Nasar is "her perpetrator" (García Márquez 115/260).

It is interesting to see how the narrator, despite his strong desire to learn the truth about the incident, completely obscures Angela's premarital experience and carelessly allows the truth about Santiago's involvement to be obscured. Belonging as he does to a male-dominated society, the narrator is apparently uninterested in the story behind Angela's loss of chastity , and

thus reproduces a sexual economy that marginalizes woman, in so far as he “passes on in silence the possibility of Angela’s desire” (Millington 81). On her part, Angela is well aware of that female desire is irrelevant to any discourse related to the transgression of the code of honor. Therefore, the absence of Angela’s premarital story is the result of an elective but active choice to remain silent because she knows that if she speaks, she will be telling a story that contradicts the language of the society. The narrator explains that Angela does not make a mystery of her experience whenever anybody asked her except “for one item that would never be cleared up: who was the real cause of her damage, and how and why” (García Márquez 104/251). She replies to the narrator many years later “[D]on’t beat it to death, cousin” (García Márquez 105/252). This is attested by Angela’s insistence on remaining discreet about the details of her possible relationship with Santiago. Any effort to prove or deny Santiago’s involvement would reveal information about her premarital experience, which is intentionally left in the shadows.

Moreover, Angela’s silence provides the space for interpreting how she acts and thinks. Although she gives her family a name —Santiago Nasar— that seems to validate the code of honor, Angela does not deny her willingness in the extramarital act, nor does she express any sign of antipathy towards sex. This allows us to consider Muñoz’s argument that Angela loses her chastity voluntarily in a sexual relationship that allows her to experiment with the spiritual side as well as the physical gratification of sex (Muñoz 104).<sup>14</sup> Having been involved in a consensual affair, she quietly asserts the existence of her emotions and desires despite the suppressive attempts. The absence of any feelings of guilt or remorse towards transgressing this code of honor indicates that she does not accept the conventions of her society. Furthermore, in her silent stance, Angela initiates a history of her own and forces the society to contend with it.

Although not everyone believes that Santiago Nasar is responsible for her loss of chastity, Angela never provides a specific motivation or detail that would prove or deny her claim. However, the utterance of Santiago's name and its aftermath gives Angela a voice and presence in the story, both for the reader and in her village's historical memory. The readers and critics will keep rationalizing her choice, and the town "that was open wound" in the end "couldn't talk about anything else for years"; the feeling of guilt is present among everyone for allowing an unjustified murder to take place (García Márquez 111-113/ 257-258). In addition, Santiago's death meant his "absence from the collective effort at storytelling [which] is crucial" as it gives Angela the sole authority on the matter (Millington 80). There is not any evidence convicting Santiago other than Angela's words. García Márquez gives Angela the advantage of being the only one in possession of the truth, and she chooses to conceal it. Santiago's absence makes both her silence and speech evidence of her character.

Despite this, Angela is still part of her community; she is influenced by its rules and responds to them. While she has no problem in being subjected to the shame of being rejected in her torn wedding dress for asserting her values —since she does not feign virginity as advised— she fears the social infamy of being rejected. This is reflected in two instances. The first occurs when she is irritated by Santiago's public comment on the expenses of the ceremony. While Santiago takes pride in calculating all the expenses, and Bayardo is proud of his ability to fund such an elaborate wedding, she considers it an insult, primarily because of her mother's advice not to talk about money in front of people. This cautious attitude about financial issues could be attributed to their family's limited resources. However, Angela does not add any personal reasoning to her mother's cautionary instruction.

The other time that she reveals the anxiety is when she refuses to wear her dress until Bayardo arrives in the house for fear of being abandoned. Socially speaking, she knows that such an abandonment would shame her endlessly in front of the community. However, she does not think that it also puts Bayardo in a critical situation in front of everybody. Millington adds that Angela herself subscribes to society's macho logic in thinking about these things (83). In the first situation, the authority is her mother, and in the second, it is social custom. In both cases, she unquestioningly accepts social values without demonstrating any personal insight.

These paradoxical situations place Angela's character both inside and outside of her society. Spivak argues, "The figure of the woman . . . disappears between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development" (*Reflections on the History* 61). In her criticism of Western feminists' understanding of the Third World woman's condition, Spivak reasons that woman's voice is lost when she stands in a controversial relationship to her society, in which she exhibits an alienated subjectivity on which her traditional social identity is constructed. However, I think that this oscillation between change and tradition does not confuse or conceal Angela's character, or what we might broadly call her voice. Rather, it adds peculiarity to her personality. It does not impose on her a foreign character that completely merges with her society; rather, it simply gives her a voice through which to depart from social values.

As we conclude by attributing character and voice to Angela, we cannot ignore the structure in which this character is shaped. Angela's voice either differs or agrees with the social values established by male domination, so her voice underpins the male/female binary opposition. Spivak would argue that this representation of the female subaltern indicated how structure is dominant, thus leaving the voice to die in shadows. However, we need to look at Angela in two perspectives. The first concerns her place in the novel: Angela, relatively

speaking, is almost the only character that is presented as having a degree of subjectivity. Unlike the other characters interviewed by the narrator, she speaks, acts, and develops. Her depiction stands out in contrast to her peers in the village, such as Divina Flor, Flora Miguel, and Prudencia Cotes. Observing the three women through Spivak's notion of speech, we find that their representation, just as that of most of the characters in the novel, does not provide enough information to indicate specific personalities, and if it does, never opens up to the limited presence of individual voice. They are primarily samples or symbols that represent social types. Each one fulfills a specific function in the novel in a way that they could be easily replaced by other characters.

Seeing Angela's character differently, however, we notice that Angela's representation largely focuses on the problems of sexuality and the expression of female desire. This kind of representation examined from Spivak's perspective aligns with her criticism of Western feminists who problematize the suppression of sexuality of third-world woman, and inadvertently silence her. One cannot deny that one of García Márquez's main interests in this novel is to criticize machismo that primarily values an unmarried woman on account of her ability to preserve her chastity prior to marriage. In order to preserve this value, society seeks to control woman's desires by completely ignoring their existence. And yet, in our discussion of García Márquez's novel, we were able to indicate how the limited experience of personhood emerges in Angela's character.

Although Angela's character is presented mostly through the narrator's perspective, the text provides her with enough space to express subjective experience within the confines of a male-dominated society that sees her as an object of exchange (for marriage) and seeks to suppress her voice. We cannot silence Angela because her experience embraces the problem of

sexual economy that unfolds in the social and historical context of the novel. We see how Angela's character combines belief in society's customs with qualities that are subjective and specific to her personality. When we hear her testimony, we sense the tension between her convictions and social mores. In addition, how she manages to express herself, sometimes through action, and other times through silence within the limited scope of her power. As this chapter finalizes the body of my thesis research, we can now move to the conclusion to see where these two post-colonial works of fiction meet to say something different about their societies.

### **Conclusion. Female Subjectivity and the Male Narrator.**

Spivak, one of the most influential cultural critics in postcolonial feminist studies, belongs to the second wave of feminism that started after 1967 in Anglo-America and Europe. Critics from the Anglo-American feminist tradition, such as Florence Howe and Elaine Showalter, are interested in female social history, and are skeptical about the possibility of female criticism and expression within male-constructed theories and/or fiction. Therefore, they advocated new models for studying women in literature based on female experience rather than male theories and frameworks. In contrast, French feminists adopted a psychoanalytic linguistic approach in which the female body plays a big role in presenting woman's experience. Major theorists associated with this movement, such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, seek to step out of male-associated language (patriarchal discourse) to provide a possibility for a neutral language that could accommodate woman's voice.

Elements of Spivak's thought are drawn from both sides of the Atlantic; however, her approach focuses on what she calls the subaltern female of the Third World, and the failure of either the Anglo-American or the French feminist position to truly account for the struggles of women in the Third World. She calls attention to the necessity of listening to the third-world woman herself in order to learn about her real (hi)story, and the structural difficulties in language and society that prevent us from doing so. Spivak says that critical thinking and writing by first-world feminists about the third-world woman is articulated in terms of dominant colonial vocabulary, and the two major essays that I have engaged throughout this thesis suggest some ways in which feminists might begin to question their assumptions about the Third World. The main question which this thesis attempts to answer positions itself in a variation on this inquiry, asking whether it is possible for third-world men to adopt "feminist" positions vis-à-vis third-

world women in their fictional writings. Specifically, I ask if it is possible for Mahfouz and García Márquez to represent the female subaltern without sustaining a patriarchal perspective. As the body chapters demonstrate, I believe Spivak's answer would be a blunt "no."

Spivak's theory demands an in-depth analysis of the female character in order to examine their explicit and implicit characteristics and motivations in relation to their authors. However, the dichotomy of speech and silence, as theorized by Spivak, needs to be extended to accommodate a middle ground that allows a space to read the characters' presence as speaking, feeling, and acting voices. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* the narrator largely paraphrases characters' testimonies. Millington comments on this, noting, "This marked tendency to minimize the dialogic potential of the material and to impose a monological discourse clearly corresponds to the dominant male activity of regulating and legislating the socio-cultural domain" (80). Although this is a criticism of García Márquez's novel, it can also be useful in reading the narrative style in *The Beginning and the End*, where Mahfouz depends mostly on interior monologues to express the thoughts and feelings of the characters, and specifically of Nefisa. In addition, both authors call attention to the sexuality of their main female characters in a way that reveals how they react to social restrictions related to the expression or acting upon their desires.

Within Spivak's definition of the terms subject, agent, and representation, she makes a "signature critical intervention—by insisting on the discontinuity between subjectivity and agency" (Birla 88). She elaborates that the female subaltern voice is "constructed as instrument, either for indigenous male authority or colonial patriarchy" when the woman is given an agency that is not her own (Birla 89). Therefore, subjectivity is not associated with the attainment of personal agency. But, woman speaks when she acquires subjectivity; she speaks her own



thoughts and feelings. In both novels, Mahfouz and García Márquez give the female characters a subjective voice through which they present their personalities, even when agency is lacking. Both characters are presented as antagonistic to their societies and at the same time acknowledge the power of its tradition, which acquires credibility to their representation in this specific moment in time. They are dynamic characters who have their own convictions and develop as the plot advances, unlike their female peers (such as Bahya in Mahfouz and the three women in García Márquez) who are relatively minor characters and who perform their roles in the novels according to type. In addition, we cannot deny that providing space for female characters in the novels within the context of closed societies of mid-twentieth century Egypt and Colombia, gives voice to the marginalized and is significant no matter how objectionable we might find it in our current time.

Finally, the controlled subjectivity, given to Nefisa and Angela, indicates the limitations of society and criticizes the values underlying its construction, but they do not constitute emancipatory projects. The authors do not foresee change; they rather point out problems within their respective societies. The authors do not sympathize with their female characters or condemn them. They are simply presented as two women who try to live their lives on their own, but are shaped and ultimately defeated by the rules of society.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup>. The first page number refers to the original Arabic text and the second refers to the English translation. The same citation form applies to the rest of the primary texts quotations in the whole thesis.

<sup>2</sup>. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"أوضح لنا المؤلف أن نفيصة التحقت بالمدرسة الابتدائية ودرست بها حتى سن البلوغ مثلها مثل معظم البنات من طبقتها في الثلاثينيات، وأن والدها قد سحبها من المدرسة وجعلها تمكث في البيت مع أمها . . . في انتظار وصول العريس، وحرص المؤلف على التأكيد على أن نفيصة لم تكن ثائرة على التقاليد بل إنها كانت فتاة مسالمة."

<sup>3</sup>. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"كانت تحقيقاً لا شعورياً لوجودها وتأكيداً لذاتها."

<sup>4</sup>. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"ومس دون أن يدري جرحها الدامي حين أخبرها أنها أجمل فتاة رآها في حياته."

<sup>5</sup>. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"قد يبدو انحراف نفيصة وسقوطها الأخلاقي إرادياً في مظهره الخارجي حيث انسأقت . . . إلى ممارسة الدعارة . . . إلا أنها لم يكن لها ذنب . . . إن تلك الحالة المأساوية التي وصلت إليها نفيصة إنما كانت ناجمة عن الظروف العائلية والاجتماعية القاسية التي طحنت الفتاة وجعلتها تنهار أخلاقياً . . . فإنها ضحية للظروف."

<sup>6</sup>. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"شهيذة مجتمع حولها إلى عاهرة لتساهم في إكمال نفقات الأسرة."

<sup>7</sup>. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"سلوكهم مفروض عليهم فرضاً ولا يملكون فيه حرية الاختيار."

<sup>8</sup>. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"لولا هذه الوفاة لكان لنفيصة شأن آخر . . . ولربما تزوجت."

9. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"إننا لا نستخلص منه نظرية في الجنس بالمعنى العلمي الدقيق . . . ثم إننا لا نحصل منه على فلسفة خاصة في الحياة الجنسية تركز على دعامة من التربية أو علم النفس سواء بالرفض أو القبول أو الابتكار.  
ذلك أن منهجه في التفكير يرى العلاقات الاجتماعية جميعها مترابطة بخيط واحد لا تنفصل إحداها عن الأخرى، ولا يمكن رؤيتها الواحدة بمعزل عن الكل . . . لذلك يمضي الجنس في أعماله في موازاة العلاقات الأخرى بحركة تلقائية عفوية."

10. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"يصور هذه العلاقة بعينها في تفاعلها . . . مع التكوين الذاتي لنفيسة الفرد."

11. This is my translation of the following original Arabic text:

"بهية في بداية ونهاية تمثل نموذج بشري بأبعاده الاجتماعية وأطره الفني، فكل النموذجين لا يتعمقه المؤلف ولا ينمي شخصيته."

12. This is my translation of the following original Spanish text:

"Angela Vicario es capaz de cuestionar y reaccionar dinámicamente contra su tradición que va en detrimento de su condición de mujer."

13. This is my translation of the following original Spanish text:

"Este varón [Bayardo], redimido por ella [Angela]"

14. This is my translation of the following original Spanish text:

"De este modo, podría asumirse que Angela Vicario pierde su virginidad en un acto de voluntad, en una entrega de amor que le permite experimentar no sólo el lado espiritual del acto carnal sino también la gratificación sensual."

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