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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Graduate Studies

Daughterly Narratives in Search of Voice:

Fadwa Tuqan, Latifa al-Zayyat, Samar Attar

A Thesis Submitted by

Rania Helmy Bedeir

to the

English and Comparative Literature Department

Graduate Program

March 31st, 2023

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

I. Dedication

To my mother
This is to you, through you, and for you

To my daughters
Because you are my sun and my moon

*I took this journey as my mother's daughter and my daughters' mother.
May this journey of healing inspire you to take yours*

II. Acknowledgments

This thesis has been a culmination of three years at the ECLT department. It has been a most rewarding and beautiful journey and process of self-exploration and expression. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and utmost respect to those who have left a lasting imprint on this journey:

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Lastly, my support network of family and friends. Thank you for all your support, encouragement, and endless days you allowed me the space to go through this journey uninterrupted. I am forever grateful.

III. Epigraph

“...her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly.”

— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

“The cathexis between mother and daughter—essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story.”

— Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*

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IV Abstract

Daughterly Narratives in Search of Voice:
Fadwa Tuqan, Latifa al-Zayyat, and Samar Attar

Rania H Bedeir
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A myriad of pressures and struggles affect Arab women as they are coming of age due to the familial and societal constructs they face. As daughters, they yearn for a voice amidst a plethora of generational boundaries, transmissions, and ideals. The intricacy of the psychological and interconnected structural factors is augmented by their gender in societies that are motivated, and often governed by, the implications of gender roles. While multiple layers of influence such as familial and sociocultural institutions affect how consciousness is formed, generational transmission, through the maternal figure, is paramount. Daughters, therefore, cannot narrate their personal stories without including the influence of the mother or the maternal figure. Mothers pass on the social definitions of their daughters' expected role as a woman, which have paramount effects on the daughters' development and process of individuation. This relationship has not only inspired psychoanalytic, sociological, anthropological, and feminist studies, but it also serves as the basis for countless fictional and autobiographical literary works. Numerous academic studies have been dedicated to the mother-daughter relationship as it has developed into a salient issue in feminist reviews. To that end, an exploration of the mother-daughter dyad illuminates the dynamics of familial relationships which are vital for the shaping of self and the establishment of gender roles, both of which have profound effects on women's individual development and choices.

The thesis examines three literary narratives written by Arab women, namely Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography* (1985); Egyptian writer and activist Latifa al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* (1960); and Syrian novelist Samar Attar's *Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl* (1990). Through close reading, this research aims to explore and analyze the tripartite structure that dominates their daughterly narratives. Firstly, it will explore the effects of mother-daughter relationships within the familial and socio-cultural context, which have a pronounced impact on the heroines' journeys of subject formation. Secondly, it will analyze the interplay between the individual and the collective and its impact on the heroines' motivations and subsequent courses of action. Finally, the research will study the heroines' journeys as they go beyond the norm to break the generational cycles and carve out their own path to autonomy and liberation, essentially, their own voice. What this research aimed to demonstrate is that for daughters to be fully liberated, to be able to find their empowered voices and way forward, and to truly affect change in the patriarchal landscape, they must first find their way back, by forging a reunion and a reconciliation with their mothers.

V. Introduction

A myriad of pressures and struggles affect Arab women as they are coming of age due to the familial and societal constructs they face. As daughters, they yearn for a voice amidst a plethora of generational boundaries, transmissions, and ideals. The intricacy of the psychological and interconnected structural factors is augmented by their gender in societies that are motivated, and often governed by, the implications of gender roles. Within the dynamic of the mother-daughter dyad, mothers often embody patriarchal values and foundations, and they try to tame their daughters to adapt and assimilate, ignoring the internal and intuitive voice of their daughters in the process. Thus, mothers essentially are part of the patriarchal system and, many times, prevent their daughters from exercising their freedoms and ambitions or asserting themselves in familial and societal settings.

This thesis explores familial structures with a concentration on the mother-daughter dynamic and the female figures in the family lineage. From that space, the daughterly narratives in this research, whether written autobiographically or fictionally, are carefully curated to depict an “authority of experience” which is to say the kind of “feminized authority that constructs a commentary on experience as it intersects with, departs from, and contests accepted social scripts for female lives” (Booth, “Locating” 44). In other words, the narratives are selected to examine how daughters tell their stories and how they ultimately find their voice despite collective constructs and maternal constraints which often force them into silence or reductive subjectivity.

Numerous academic studies have been dedicated to the mother-daughter relationship as it has developed into a salient issue in feminist reviews. To that end, an exploration of the mother-daughter dyad illuminates the dynamics of familial relationships which are vital for the shaping of self and the establishment of gender roles, both of which have profound effects

on women's individual development and choices. Variations of child-rearing practices and experiences are influenced by a family's class status, social standing, and economic and educational levels. Additionally, ethnic, religious, and geographical factors inform the family's sub-cultural position, and the way children are socialized within family structures. Consequently, within the framework of subject formation, of which the mother-daughter relationship is key, the context of the family, culture, and society in which it is embedded is pivotal. This research is primarily concerned with familial structures and dynamics within the Arab region. Whilst there is a myriad of differences across the subregions of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula and across the urban, rural, and Bedouin styles of living across the subregions, the focus will be on the hegemonic cultural constructions and the "culturally unifying forces which have led to the sharing of some features throughout the region" (Gregg 5). To that end, the emphasis will primarily be on the "modal" family which, with some exceptions, represents the dominant attitudes, values, and ideals of the urban, middle-class, Arab Muslim family. Within this structure, the family acts as a microcosm of the society at large and echoes the "authority, hierarchy, dependency, and repression which govern social relations in general" (Sharabi 244). In that way, the family unit analyzed essentially socializes its members by reverberating the values and moral codes of the societal and cultural institutions. As Halim Barakat asserts: "the family constitutes the dominant social institution through which persons and groups inherit their religious, class, and cultural affiliations" (*The Arab World* 97).

In contextualizing the cultural psychology of women in the Arab world, research suggests that the "internalization of cultural constructions of social personae is in accordance with the imperatives of the patriarchal system" (Gregg 90). Essentially, psychological development is deeply embedded in the family, in societal conditions, and –ultimately-- in the culture's primary value system. Ethnographers and scholars across the Arab region argue

that family systems found in societies extending from North Africa to the Arabian Peninsula operate under patriarchal principles. Thus, the traditional and “modal” family structure, which constitutes the social and economic unit, is patriarchal with a hierarchical way of life. In it, the mother joins the father’s kinship or patrilocal group, and the children take on his surname in a patrilineal system of descent. As Simone de Beauvoir explains: “Through marriage woman is now torn up by the roots from the group into which she was born and annexed by her husband’s group; he imposes his domestic divinities upon her, and the children born to her belong to the husband’s family” (114). Within this modality, the mother and children are usually dependent financially and socially on the father and they are expected to obey his rules, submit to his wishes, and treat him with extreme deference: “the father expects respect and unquestioning compliance with his instructions” (Barakat, “The Arab Family” 31).

The values and moral codes of the patriarchal system are highly internalized throughout early childhood which ultimately determines the structure of how consciousness is shaped and identity is formed. Such characteristics propel the family structure to the forefront, as Pierre Bourdieu asserts: “the family is the alpha and omega of the whole system: the primary group and structural model for any possible grouping, it is the indissoluble atom of society which assigns and assures to each of its members his place, his function, his very reason for existence and, to a certain degree, his existence itself” (*The Algerians* 97). Consequently, the successes and failures of its individuals become that of the family which, in turn, places the responsibility of the family honor on every member individually and collectively. From that space, self-denial becomes the way of life, and “familism—membership in the family—rather than individualism, [becomes] the value orientation inculcated by parents and traditional educational systems” (Abudi 29). This collective mentality is highly supported by religion which emphasizes the centrality of the family

structure in society. Moreover, the Arab family exercises a great deal of control over the individual, sanctioned primarily by religion, which for most Arabs, acts as an integral regulator of behavior and a foundation for identity: “The rules established within the family are generally characterized by a lack of privacy, a low tolerance for individuality or autonomy, and an insistence on obedience and conformity” (Abudi 31).

Chief to this type of society is the dominance of the father, the patriarch, around whom the family is structured. In most cases, by the age of seven or eight, the father --with his societal beliefs-- starts to enter the universe of the child. Yet it is the mother, along with the female members of the household, that exerts the greatest influence on the child’s development, especially in the early years. This arises from the natural biological order where the mother is the primary caretaker of the household and children: “the first affective relations of the child, the first steps of life, the first forms of socialization, the apprenticeship of language, and the ways of living and behaving are left to the mother; it is for the mother alone to initiate the child into these experiences” (Bouhdiba 128). Women and children in this modality, especially daughters, are usually denied autonomy and they are seen as “sociological phantoms” under the “systematic devaluation” of the paternal authorities (Bouhdiba 127).

In the hierarchal context of patriarchy, the daughter and the mother are marginalized: “because she owns nothing, a woman does not enjoy the dignity of being a person; she herself forms a part of the patrimony of a man: first of her father, then of her husband” (De Beauvoir 114). This marginalization creates traumatic experiences that highly affect the psyche of the daughter and results in “poly-segmented” experiences which, rather than converging with society, lead to aggravation and induce a multiplicity of conflicts and psychological issues: “the poly-segmented socialization expresses, in its own way, the doubly marginal position [of daughters] with respect to society as a whole and as part of the dyad

which she constitutes with her mother” (Bouhdiba 130). Daughters learn to form and curate their self-image following the judgment and value systems of the collective. Moreover, in this system, as Bouhdiba states, the “education of the girl is an apprenticeship in the superiority of the male, and in the necessity to prepare herself to accept the harsh constraints that nature, men, and God himself have decreed for her” (131).

By analyzing gender structures as a way of understanding the family dynamic, various feminists have raised integral questions about the ongoing relationships between the familial unit and the greater societal and cultural spheres. Essentially, gender is an intricate social construction with a multitude of dimensions that are highly affected by families and the institutions around them. On the individual level, dichotomous gender classifications and forms of femininity and masculinity are central to the processes of shaping identity as well as social placements. In that way, gender is highly related and influenced by the familial and societal structures where gender divisions of labor are clearly identified and where women typically bear more responsibility for the household, childbearing, and social reproduction. These societal constraints affect the way male and female genders are expected to manifest within the “modal family.” The roles men are expected to perform in their communities are typically associated with being manly with a sense of aggression, dominance, masculine pride, and authority over women. Thus, the superiority systematically accorded to men is affirmed in the familial and social structures, as Bourdieu asserts: “The primordial investment in the social games which makes a man a real man --the sense of honor, virility, ‘manliness’-- is the undisputed principle of all the duties that a man ‘owes to himself,’ in other words, what he must do to live up, in his own eyes, to a [society’s] idea of manhood” (*Masculine Domination* 48).

Within that context, the socially constructed idea of femininity and the ideals that women are socialized to adhere to affect women across many cultures and class systems and

continue to be internalized and passed down through generations. Thus, from an early age, female socialization, which is championed by the mother, is guided towards the appeasement of male family members, which leads to the augmentation of the male ego as the dominant authority that is served, hailed, and obeyed by mothers and daughters alike. Moreover, this belief system dictates that daughters take a back seat in service to the male members of the family. In this patriarchal system, daughters are expected to display modesty, virtue, chastity, and submissiveness. This is highly influenced by “honor-based” subcultures, which find their base in tradition, and where men find their pride in “the sexual purity of [their] mother, wife and daughters, and sisters, not in [their] own” (Gregg 93). In connecting honor with women’s oppression, Fatima Mernissi asserts that associating the deity with honor turns women into “one of man’s most treasured commodities: the virgin, with hymen intact sealing a vagina which no man has touched” (183). Like honor, women’s sexuality is the manifestation of a purely male preoccupation in societies where inequality, scarcity, and the degrading subjection of men over women deprive the community of realizing the full potential of women. Mernissi links such societal discrepancies between men and women to inequality. One that continues to flourish whenever economic disparity, a key factor in silencing women’s voices and placing them as a permissible commodity, prevails: “the lack of understanding between men and women is essentially a lack of equality” (184).

Women’s oppression extends to gender assignments which are linked to the norms that societies have adapted to and assimilated into their cultural vernacular. Women have always been subjected to oppression, backed up by religious texts that are grossly misinterpreted by men of religion who insist on women’s inferiority and subjugation. Those texts and their patriarchal interpretations aided and abetted in the misrepresentation of the true role of women in society. Women were relegated to domesticity where their sole duties were to God and family. Women’s femininity and sexuality have always been looked down

upon and propagated as sinful by socially constructed stereotypes which have impeded women's fight to find their voices, express their status and seek their opportunities. Though rigorous anthropological, psychological, and deep analyses have addressed the issue, as Nasr Hamid Abu-Zeid posits, issues such as female oppression find their root in the misinterpretation of religious texts. He argues that these texts were interpreted in a way that placed the sin of Adam and Eve on Eve and that led the collective consciousness to internalize these notions and pigeonhole women —across time— as seductresses and originators of sin. He further argues that men of religion use the biological differences between men and women like physical build, menstruation, and the bearing of children as semantic manipulations for the counter-interpretation of the religious text to fit their patriarchal agendas (37).

These collective dogmas were similarly critiqued by de Beauvoir as she addressed how women have been denied agency and regarded as a deviation from the norm. She asserts: “the fundamental assumption that man is the norm and woman is the deviation has dominated the social, political and cultural life and consequently women have internalized this ideology so that they live in a constant state of inauthenticity” (qtd. Leitch et al. 1404). This resulted in impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and, more importantly, find their voice in the process. It is perhaps this notion of internalizing that has caused women to unconsciously enter into a kind of subliminal agreement or social contract with their societies and, more significantly, with men. These contracts assign men as the dominant party and women as the “other.” In essence, because of these oppressive ideologies, women's power has been given over to the men in their lives and they have —inadvertently— made subliminal agreements to keep silent, submissive, and at times, conspirators, and collaborators with the patriarchal system.

Dominant societal views concerning patriarchy and its subsequent oppression of women and their sexuality have caused daughters to react in various ways to the kind of subjugation they face. These various forms of oppression usually start in their home environments and are enforced not only by their fathers and brothers but most often by their mothers, senior women of the family, and sometimes even younger women in their family who try to attain male satisfaction and admiration by demonstrating submissiveness. In fact, the main betrayal that daughters feel towards their mothers is their acceptance, appeasement, and often encouragement of this system which marginalizes their whole existence from “womb to tomb” unchangingly (Bouhdiba 131). Deniz Kandiyoti asserts that within an oppressive system, mothers and daughters try to find a way to “bargain” with the system without challenging its premises. Kandiyoti associates “classic” patriarchy with the Middle East and East Asia and showcases how women have had to find ways or strategies to counter this kind of deep-rooted belief system and hierarchy of power that affects every aspect of their lives. Most often, their response has been that of internalized submissiveness. In essence, women recognize that this is the norm and that there is no way out of the societal laws that have been forced upon them. Moreover, with minimal financial standing, in most cases, this augments the problem further. Hence, mothers and senior women in the family have often become collaborators with the patriarchal system as they assimilate themselves within its system of play. As Kandiyoti asserts: “[w]omen’s strategies are played out in the context of identifiable patriarchal bargains that act as implicit scripts that define, limit and inflect their market and domestic options” (285). Essentially, the bargain leads to submissiveness and propriety in exchange for protection. Yet one of the main fallacies of this system is that it also shapes the more unconscious facets of women’s subjectivity since they seep through their early socialization and cause them to internalize and normalize those notions in their cultural milieu. Consequently, as Kandiyoti posits: “[i]ronically, women

through their actions to resist passivity and total male control, became participants with vested interests in the system that oppressed them” (280-81). That is in line with Michel Foucault’s system of power in which he claims that the subject holds power only as a function of his or her place in the institution, or the permeated system of authority. Thus, both mothers and daughters are located —though differently—within the institution and go through their paces within a network that guides and oversees their conduct (Leitch et al. 1618). Thus, many activities that may seem to oppose power are, as Foucauldian analysis shows, “complicitous” with it, reinforcing rather than contesting its reign (Leitch et al. 1621). Some daughters, as the literary works in this research will show, are unable to subscribe to the structure and consequently rebel against the whole system with full recognition of the dire consequences, not only to their reputation but, at times, to their personal safety and psychological sanity.

Critical analysis of the traditional family structure indicates that “the general situation of women forms the greatest obstacle to national progress in [Arab countries]” (Al-Sa‘id 375) and, consequently, the efforts to change them have been “central to the women’s movement” (Thorne 4). Historically, the patriarchal system has been hard to elucidate; yet out of all the societal institutions, it is the most biological and unchanging. Since the nineteenth century, social theorists have regarded the family as “a private and distinctive sphere, set apart from the public world where the division between public and private is deeply ideological” (Thorne 22). Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke use “invisible and visible” feminisms to clarify the distinction between the private and the explicit in an attempt at explaining the comprehensive feminist experience (vx). On the private front, it is the authorities within the family, including the father, brother, and often the mother, who enforce silence. On the public front, feminist movements, which saw their pinnacle during the 1960s and the 1970s, were met with societal and cultural disdain and suppression. The women who spoke out did not

necessarily identify themselves as feminists per se, rather their voices were adamant about “questioning the inherited wisdom passed down by patriarchal authorities and surrogates [as they searched] for a new ideology reflecting their changing everyday lives” (Badran and Cooke xix). To that end, Arab women found ways to destroy “patriarchally-produced female archetypes” and replace them with their prototypes: women who have a voice to express their needs and desires. Nawal El Saadawi best delineates this genealogy as she asserts that Egypt and the Arab world faced many trials and tribulations, especially during the nineteenth century, at the pinnacle of colonialism. Their peoples’ conditions regressed especially with the close cooperation of their rulers with foreign imperialists who imposed heavy economic, social, and political burdens on them (170). Typically, women’s conditions were the worst since they faced the double burden of a patriarchal as well as an autocratic class system. This was met with a strong wave of male, and subsequently female, Arab feminism that can be dated as far back as the late nineteenth century.

Scholars often assign the male-generated feminist movement as far back as 1899 with the publication of Egyptian lawyer Qasim Amin’s book *Tahrir al-Mar’a* (The Liberation of the Women) and Tunisian Tahir al-Haddad’s *Imra’atuna fi al-Shari’a wal-Mujtama’*, 1929 (Our Women in Islamic Law and Society). Other pro-feminist men included “Lutfi al-Sayyid, founder of *al-Jarida*, and the Iraqi Poet Jamil al-Zahawi, who was imprisoned in 1911 for advocating unveiling” (Badran and Cooke xvi). The ideologies behind these books were seminal as they asserted that the Arab Society was dogmatic in their handling of women’s issues such as lack of education, societal constraints, and the veiling, segregation, and seclusion of women practiced in middle and upper-class societies. More importantly, they were adamant about the notion that those ideas were not authorized by religion. These ideas, which some critics have dubbed as imperialistic and Western-inspired, reverberated with women throughout the Arab world. In the period from the 1860s to the 1920s, middle and

upper-class women engaged in “invisible feminism” where women in the harems propagated and circulated pro-feminist books and started journals such as “*Al-Fatat* (1892), *Anis al-Jalis* (1893), and *Fatat al-Sharq* (1906) to disseminate the ideologies endorsed by the pro-feminist men of their time” (Badran and Cooke xviii).

Within the colonial context, issues of gender were highly politicized as they involved the rethinking of the West-to-East influences and the effects of imperialism on the social structure of society. To that end, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the rising of people’s resistance to foreign and local domination and, with it, a renaissance in the areas of literature, political thought, philosophy, and knowledge. The period from the 1920s to the 1960s reverberated that movement and witnessed the rise of the more organized women’s public movements: “There were active movements in Egypt between the 1920s and mid-1950s, in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq in the 1930s and 1940s and Sudan in the 1950s” (Badran and Cooke xviii). These movements were highly influenced and inspired by national resistance against colonialism and as part of the struggle for liberation. Arab women writers, who were considered pioneers of the feminist movements, rallied for national movements against imperialism and towards autonomy and freedom. More importantly, they instigated the awareness that women’s emancipation, as El Saadawi asserts, “was one of the crucial fronts in the struggle against backwardness, foreign colonialism, and internal reactionary forces” (170). The feminist movements were not eliminated by the individual states, yet they were repressed and often co-opted by the governments to advance their agendas.

Additionally, women’s fight for liberation “raised a problematic contradiction between a liberation enterprise motivated by a desire for modernization and advancement and a viewpoint that saw the colonizer as the primary source of this modernization” (Ashour et al. 3). Essentially, those who were against the feminist movement used imperialism and the alleged influence of the West to impede progress. Nonetheless, from the 1970s onwards, a

resurgence of the feminist movement took place in many of the Arab states, namely Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Other Arab states, namely of the Arabian Peninsula, which had not yet commenced their fight for women's liberation went through their first wave of feminist actions. However, the rise of the Islamic fundamentalist movement hindered those states from advancing their agenda.

The literature conceived by Arab women writers in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries suggests the kind of social, cultural, and political projects that were of integral impact on society in general, and that highly affected women's fight for freedom in specific. Through their writing, Arab women writers were able "to think against the current" (Badran and Cooke xix) by probing the generational transmissions that have been passed down by the patriarchal system and authorities. These women were essentially conceiving of ways "against universalizing discourses about patriarchy, Islam, and oppression" (Abu-Lughod 23) and negotiating the best choices available to them under the tyranny of the social, political, and religious restrictions that have governed them. Consequently, through their written words, they sought to subvert the hold of patriarchal control and reject any notions of "imposed patterns of thought" (Badran and Cooke xix). Thus, the act of writing was essentially a radical act for women within their societies where their voices were not heard. During the first half of the twentieth century, women writers experimented with the short story and the novel as genres that they adapted from the West. Most of the topics centered around the difficulties faced by individuals, namely what women endure in their societies and the rapid national changes they were experiencing. Yet it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that feminist voices found a wide audience and reception for their literary expressions. Their narratives questioned the societal norms and the systematic oppression of women and portrayed the constant oscillation between individual needs and collective

constraints. Through their heroines, they also mapped out the path to individual liberation and, to borrow from Virginia Woolf, delineated the strive to carve “a space of their own” (5).

Historically, the dominant narrative represented in literature, as argued by feminists from Woolf onwards, has been male. The narratives explored in this thesis, therefore, break the mold as socio-cultural documentation that delineates how generational transmissions occur, and how female (and arguably feminist) consciousness is shaped. This is integral not only as a discourse for academic study but, more importantly, it opens the space for scholarly dialogue on how to break the status quo of generational and familial patterns that have historically impeded women’s growth. The act of writing is part and parcel of the overall discourse on the way generations are being socialized into fitting a certain mold that is reverberated by the mother figure. Thus, the intricacy of such a relationship harbors a need for nurturance and, simultaneously, a quest for autonomy and individuation. Through the act of personal narration, the works selected serve as paradigms for introspection in studying the interplay between “hegemonic and dissenting voices” (Hirsch 9) and between individual and collective motivations. The literary works also portray the “disidentification” of the heroines created by the writers from conventional and established constructs and how this influences their self-autonomy and their process of individuation--essentially how they find their voices. The women writers studied have created characters “who define themselves by their dissenting relation to dominant tradition” (Hirsch 8).

The thesis examines how Arab women writers have created maternal figures who embody sociocultural values and foundations. As described in feminist literature, the mother-daughter dyad is the “essential human relationship” (A. Rich, *Of Woman* 127) and the “most private and the most formative of women’s relationships” (Hirsch 19). Moreover, the research delves into the dynamics between mothers and daughters, in their capacities as

generational transmitters of the social evaluations of their daughters' expected roles, in the system of patriarchy.

The literary works used in the research are comprised of literature that is written by women from across the Arab world from the 1960s onwards. Essentially, the texts are carefully curated to present various portraits of Arab family life and the nuanced insights and idiosyncrasies of the socio-psychological variables that affect familial relationships from various parts of the Arab world to include a myriad of perspectives and voices. The texts, whether autobiographical or fictional, are chosen not on the basis of the literary genre but rather as representations of selfhood and sociocultural documentation of the time. Moreover, the texts chosen are written by Arab women to illuminate the female voice from the female perspective. In ascribing the title of daughterly narratives, the research aims to be daughter-centric in that it will analyze all the motivations, impetuses, and drivers that have shaped and influenced the daughters' subject formation, with an emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship.

The thesis examines daughterly narratives in Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan's (1917-2003) *Rihla Jabaliyya, Rihla Sa'ba: Sira Dhatiyya* (1985), translated by Olive Kenny as *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography* (1990); Egyptian writer and activist Latifa al-Zayyat's (1923-1996) *Al-Bab al-Maftuh* (1960), translated by Marilyn Booth as *The Open Door* (2000); and Syrian novelist Samar Attar's (b. 1945) *Lina: Lawhat Fatat Dimashqiyya* (1982), translated by the author as *Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl* (1994). Through close reading, this research delves into these three modern narratives of Arab women to examine their portrayal of how daughters navigate the structural systems and construct their autonomous voice.

VI. Fadwa Tuqan

A. Identifying the Self: The Poetic Self

In exploring Tuqan's highly introspective autobiographical narrative, which delves into the interiority of the self and how she arrives at finding her voice and poetic self, the research will start by analyzing what constitutes the formation of the self and how it materializes and functions within the familial, societal, and cultural structures. Tuqan's selfhood, which is influenced by a plethora of relationships that are mediated through her primal relationship with her mother, is in a perpetual conflict between diverse dichotomies of nurturance and autonomy, submission and rebellion, and occupation and liberation.

An autonomous voice is essentially an expression of the self and constructing it demands a path to autonomy which is integral to the shaping and actualization of the self. As Judith Butler asserts: "Being a self is no simple or continuous affair, but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being" (30). Uncovering the truths about the self is a lifelong journey mediated by the understanding that not having property of the self "is not [being] a subject, and not [having] agency" (Haraway 135). Shereen Abouelnaga suggests that finding an autonomous voice is synonymous with a "route to agency" which is to say, being a free and autonomous individual. Yet she also asserts, according to post-structuralist critiques, that agency cannot be studied in a void and without careful analysis of the social order that surrounds it. In essence, the self is not separate from the collective and the social context: "The subject itself is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity, its reality is the tissue of social relations" (25). The notion of agency, therefore, is highly susceptible to—and governed by— social negotiations. Daughters have had to negotiate the best choices available to them under the tyranny of the social, political, and religious restrictions that have governed them. These choices are closer

to forced choices since the subjects that are governing them do not offer them any meaningful alternatives.

In analyzing the self, Stephanie Lawler argues that it is made up of the “inherited self”, the “social self”, and the “intrinsic self,” all of which are mediated through the mother and the way she mothers. The “inherited self” which contains the “passing down of inherited material through kin relations of descent” ultimately limits the freedom of choice as it predetermines certain aspects of oneself as “indissoluble [since] its own genetic formation is normally deemed irreversible” (60). In contextualizing this assertion within the mother-daughter relationship, the “fear of becoming one’s mother” which Adrienne Rich, following Lynne Sukenick, has coined as “matrophobia” (*Of Woman* 237) explains the notion of daughters seeing parts of their mothers reproduced in themselves, augmented by the premise that the “inherited self” cannot bypass consciousness. Moreover, this reproduction of some parts of the mother in some parts of the self forces daughters to consciously *produce* their autonomy in an attempt at distancing themselves from their mothers. In addition to the “inherited self,” the “social self” is heavily influenced by the socialization of the familial and societal constructs: “The family, and, in particular, the relationship with the mother, was seen as a primary and highly significant setting within which the self is shaped” (Lawler 63). Understanding the “social self,” which is highly influenced by early childhood interactions, is integral in analyzing how the emotional state of daughters and their subject formation materializes.

Studies in child development theorize that self-formation and self-realization find their base in belonging to familial and societal groups and assert that “because individuals play many roles or belong to several groups, they develop multiple self-conceptions, in this manner, the self comes to be organized as a social structure” (Gregg 291). Essentially, what the research suggests is that there is an amalgamation of “naturalism and social

constructionism” in analyzing the development of the self which is “frequently figured through the mother” (Lawler 72) since it is mothers who have the most influence on how children are “*produced*.” To that end, any individual deviance from societal norms is rooted in parent-child interactions. Thus, just like the “inherited self,” the “social self” is considered the responsibility of the mother but in this case “less through what she *is* than through what she *does*” (68). In this context, the distinction between motherhood, “as an experience and as an institution” (A. Rich, *Of Woman* 169), is integral as it distinguishes between the expectations of mother-daughter interactions of closeness and bonding versus those interactions “which are fostered by the oppressive culture in which mothers socialize their daughters as they must, not as they might” (Arcana 5). Finally, the “intrinsic self” seeps from the holds of inherited or genetic and societal factors and uncovers the “unique combination of characteristics” (Strathern 166) which represents the true essence and constitution of the self. Though the “inherited self” may shape it and the “social self” can impact it, the “intrinsic self” is essentially the core identity which is “unique and intrinsic to the self, itself” (Lawler 69).

Multiple layers of the self affect how female subject formation is shaped. That is, how female consciousness is constructed under familial and socio-collective institutions and the process of individualization and autonomy under said constructs. Thus, the interplay between the individual and the collective plays a major role in the formation of the self. George Klein makes the distinction between the autonomous self “as a locus of action and decision” and the self as a part of the collective: “‘We’ identities are also part of the self,” which is to say the self is “both separate and part of an entity beyond itself” (178). System theorists, in their bid to understand the self, have argued for the importance of the “coexistence of affiliative and autonomous tendencies” (Stechler and Kaplan 88) and the special importance of what is referred to as a “relational self” in women.

Psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud theorized that the mother-daughter conflict is inherent and rooted in their gender and thus almost impossible to resolve. Essentially, Freud argued that the pre-oedipal period was the “determinant of women’s difference” (Hirsch 20) which assigns the maternal dominance of the early childhood period and their identification with their daughters more than their sons as the reason daughters acquired a “characteristically feminine, affiliative and relational sense of self” (20). Essentially, this delineated how the interpersonal scope of relationships is internalized by the daughter and configured in the adult personality and how daughters became “gendered subjects” within the societal culture thus providing an analysis of “the functioning of patriarchy within the individual psyche” (Mitchell xiv). By dissecting her childhood, family life, societal influences, and national occurrences through her “intimate relational self,” Tuqan probes her interiority by locating her narrative at the interplay between the individual self vis-a-vis the institutionalized collective. Daughters first learn about their place within the collective in their mother’s universe. In that way, mothers pass on the social evaluations of their daughters’ expected role as a woman, which have paramount effects on the daughters’ individual development and future choices. Thus, one cannot study the interplay between the “I” and the “We,” which is at the heart of Tuqan’s narrative, without digging into the relationship between the “I” and the “her.”

B. *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography*

The title of Palestinian and Arab poet Fadwa Tuqan’s revolutionary work *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography*, is inspired by her narrative setting which is home to “Jabal an-Nar” (The Mountain of Fire) in the Palestinian city of Nablus. Set against the backdrop of Palestine and the plight of its people, Tuqan’s autobiography is about the political struggle and resistance of her fellow Palestinians, as well as a very personal account of the interiority of the self and its construction. Considered to be a “poetic odyssey” (Malti-

Douglas, *Problematic Birth* 161), Tuqan's narrative introspects her life through her personal journey. Though at times she oscillates between the individual self and the collective self, Tuqan's path to finding her voice begins by freeing herself and her female consciousness, which in turn evolves into merging with the collective project and consciousness.

Tuqan's epilogue, "They played their roles in my life and melted away in the creases of time" (Tuqan, *Rihla Jabaliyya* 7)¹, provides a cue about how she intends to situate her narrative to the readers. Firstly, it preempts that though she is the one telling the story, she is aware that it is highly relational. Essentially, it is her personal history interwoven with the voices of others that makes her narrative deeply personal and readily collective. Moreover, with the understanding that her singular voice is composed of a self or selves that are "transient through continual change, in a perpetual state of becoming," it also reiterates that Tuqan's epilogue delineates a narrative "in which multiple selves come together to tell their stories and validate their singularity as well as their affiliation" (al-Nowaihi 486). In that way, Tuqan's narrative is a journey between the construction and navigation of the layers of the *self*: "[the text] is a quest to find the self between asserting her egoistic self, on the one hand, and desiring to be part of a more collective entity on the other" (Golley 118). A quest that is fortified with a plethora of internal conflicts between her individualistic predispositions and the pressures of the collective where Tuqan is constantly negotiating between spheres and variations of the self. In that way, the journey in the narrative takes on a certain complexity with an understanding that "it is in the voicings and silencing of texts and characters that it expresses its nonconformity and defiance, always from within the culture it challenges" (Sheetrit 104).

¹ This specific citation denotes the page number in the original Arabic version only. The English translation by Oliver Kenny does not include Tuqan's epilogue.

Tuqan's autobiography, which was published serially in 1978-1979 in the Arab Israeli Newspaper *al-Jadid* and then in book form in 1985 (Mir 361), is essentially a coming-of-age story about the accomplished and celebrated Palestinian and Arab poet. Born in 1917 to an upper-class conservative land-owning family in Nablus, Tuqan traces her personal, literary, and poetic journey and weaves within it the struggles against the oppression that she experienced in her conservative environment to arrive at finding her voice. Written in the first person, Tuqan traces Fadwa's² personal account which is interwoven with the collective history of a nation that is replete with the dualities of nurturance and autonomy, submission and rebellion, and occupation and liberation.

Chief among the dualities experienced by Fadwa is the dichotomy between the need for nurturance and the quest for autonomy, through separation from her mother, which will come to inform all the complexities that she will face. Her opening lines give way to her perception of herself, her relationship with her mother, and to the feelings of alienation, isolation, and nonentity that have made much of her journey an uphill one: "I emerged from the darkness of the womb into a world unprepared to accept me. My mother had tried to get rid of me during the first months of her pregnancy. Despite repeated attempts, she failed" (12/12)³. Starting the narrative with these lines, Tuqan emphasizes the mother as the primary source of oppression as she chose to deny her life. Further, as Fedwa Malti-Douglas asserts, "the act of entry into the world become[s] a problematic event" where the "aborted abortion" (*Problematic Birth* 165) situates the ideal of motherhood, otherwise revered in the Arab world, into a problem. In that way, the narrative subverts, demystifies, and problematizes not

² The text portrays a separation between the writing self Fadwa Tuqan, and the self being written about, Fadwa. To that end, the thesis will refer to the writing self as Tuqan and the self being written about as Fadwa.

³ Throughout the thesis, when citing the primary sources, the first page number indicated will be of the English translation followed by the page number of the Arabic original. In this case English translation by Oliver Kenny and original Arabic by Fadwa Tuqan.

only motherhood “a quasi-sacred activity and the life dream of virtually all Middle Eastern women” but also the mother herself (165).

Associating her birth with a “nonevent” calls Fadwa’s whole being into question, especially considering that the family already had six children and her father merely yearned for a fifth son. Thus, despite being “overcome with the burden of pregnancy” (13/ 13), her mother’s pregnancies and failed attempts at abortion point to the mother’s lack of control over her body and --more importantly-- highlight her mother’s submission to the father’s will. A sense of blame also seeps in as Tuqan asserts that her mother “did not try to abort herself until [Fadwa’s] turn came” (13/ 13). This not only creates deep feelings of rejection and resentment for Fadwa, but it also serves as the prism that informs her relationship with her mother and herself for years to come. Tuqan is keen to elucidate her mother’s neglect and cites her mother’s inability to remember her birthdate as a token of her invisibility. What made matters worse was that her mother’s only means of recollection was by linking the date of her birth with her beloved nephew’s death which, according to her mother, she mourned with great sadness and distress. Tuqan’s much later awareness of psychological studies brings her to the conclusion that “the mother’s health during pregnancy and emotions all affect the child” (14/ 14) which, as Mira Tzoreff suggests, leads Tuqan to conclude “that her mother’s emotional state left her with irreversible emotional and psychological scars” (63).

Feelings of worthlessness continued and were heightened as Tuqan, aware of the association of new babies with good fortune, speculates whether her mother associated “her arrival in the family with the misfortune that befell it” (19/ 20) since the British deported and exiled her father to Egypt after her birth. This is linked, in Tuqan’s narrative sequence, with her mother’s decision to place her in the constant care of a house helper al-Samra only to be retrieved, from the helper’s house, for breastfeeding. In fact, when she was being weaned, it was al-Samra who would soothe her cries and make her feel secure. Jane Flax, whose

research focuses on the conflict between nurturance and autonomy in mother-daughter relationships, addresses the importance of the symbiotic phase which is the time the infant recovers from the birthing experience and tries to reestablish the “physiological equilibrium it had in the womb” (173). During symbiosis, “the infant behaves and functions as though he and his mother were an omnipotent system--a dual unity within one common boundary” (Mahler et al. 44), and --most importantly-- the infant is highly sensitized to their mother’s feelings and emotional state. Flax asserts that this phase is the “primal soil” from which all ensuing relationships are governed and formed. Moreover, unlike Fadwa and her mother, it is in this phase that strong bonds between mother and child are established; and later experiences, no matter how fulfilling they are, cannot compensate for any inadequacies that occur during this period. In that way, the lack and inadequacy of “symbiosis” that Fadwa experiences as a lack of nurturance or “degree of warmth, support, and acceptance that is expressed toward the child” (Anderson and Sabatelli 205) account for setbacks in her self-esteem in her formative years. As Flax asserts: “A girl is less likely to have the resources from the symbiotic period to develop an autonomous ego or to absorb blows to her self-esteem” (178). Thus, the issue of nurturance --or lack thereof-- that Fadwa experiences becomes a central theme in the dynamics between her and her mother as it is “the most vital resource for individual growth and development” (Abudi 180). Phyllis Chesler asserts that most daughters are “motherless daughters” in patriarchal societies. That is to say that they are not “mothered into heroism but rather their legacy is one of capitulation and deprivation. Female children are quite literally starved for physical nurturance and a legacy of power and humanity from [mother]” (*Women and Madness* 59). Thus, the lack of nurturance that Fadwa continually experiences from her mother, which informs much of her psychological state, is deeply rooted in her mother’s subjugation and repression within the highly patriarchal system.

Through the act of remembrance and telling of her story, Tuqan is also aware that childhood trauma has a lifetime imprint: “the bitter taste of the hurts we sustain in our childhood never leaves us” (19/ 21). Fadwa’s relationship with her mother continued into more conflict and “the figure of her mother became a negative obsession” (Tzoreff 64) as illustrated in the narrative. She recalls how her mother would recount endless anecdotes about the other siblings only to find nothing to say about her, despite numerous pleas from Fadwa: “Cringing with a feeling of nonentity, I would tell myself: I am nothing. I have no place in her memory” (19/ 20). A. M. Sheehri points to the significance of the mother’s silence: “The silence generated by her mother’s non-tellings, her un verbalized stories, the untold anecdotes, is poignant because it speaks volumes about the authority her mother lords over her daughter. She has the power to make Fadwa feel insignificant, thereby undermining her daughter as she herself has been undermined” (125). This echoes Chesler’s point about how motherhood is affected by patriarchy. A subjugated and repressed mother will most likely subjugate her daughter because she has been socialized to do so on one hand, and to prepare her daughter for what she will inevitably face in society on other hand.

Among the numerous examples that Tuqan elucidates is her mother’s neglect in dressing her, causing her physical pain and hitting her while combing her hair and punishing her undeservingly: “I, filled with feelings of suppressed defeat and a bitter sense of anger at the injustice, would try to scream out her unfairness, but my voice would stick in my throat” (21/ 22). Yet despite all these grievances and the “mixture of contradictory feelings” that Fadwa felt for her mother, it was always the experience of closeness and nurturing she was yearning for: “Filial love is often clothed in hate. Despite my extreme sensitivity to Mother’s treatment, I was at the same time closely attached to her emotionally” (21/ 22). The only time that Fadwa felt any physical or emotional connection to her mother was when she was sick with malaria: “I would secretly feel very happy when, from time to time, I had an attack of

malaria, as these were the only occasions when Mother manifested her motherly feelings” (21/ 23). Margret Mahler argues that should the child not receive the proper nurture at this stage, they are faced with contradictory feelings of wanting to remain in the symbiotic phase and at the same time fear losing it: “one cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of the optimal availability of the mother during this subphase” (102). Fadwa expressed those sentiments through her constant need for nurturance in addition to her fear of her mother’s death: “fearing she would die and leave us alone; I would entreat God on *Lailat al-Qadr* that the leaf of her life would stay green” (21/ 22).

Feelings of isolation continue throughout Fadwa’s childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as she faces oppression and subjugation from her mother, her family as well as the society around her. Fadwa lived in a traditional Arab Muslim family home where hierarchy is highly related to gender and age. Typical of a patriarchal system, it places males in a space of domination and females in subordinate and marginalized roles in a secluded and segregated household where they are forced to wear the veil, are kept in the house, and are only allowed to go out with chaperones. Essentially, she lived under “tyrannical surveillance, repression, and subjugation” (28/ 32). To that end, Tuqan is adamant about detailing her childhood life because the self-aware narrator is cognizant of its effects on the individual: “Our childhood complexes influence us all our lives. Those who generated them in us pass on; the days and years roll by with these problems still crouching there, curbing, and directing our steps” (28/ 28).

Tuqan is resolute about revealing this constant feeling of imprisonment that stayed with her until adulthood: “I yearned continually to escape from my time and place. The time was an age of subjugation, repression, and dissolution into nothingness; the place was the prison of the house” (12/ 12). These lines give weight to her familial dilemma and what she faced in her childhood living with her family and extended family who occupied a large

estate within the walls of the harem. Her repetitive description of her household as a “prison” and a “bottled-up harem” depicts the way she experiences her reality in her home life and the kind of “iron mold” that she could not break through, the “time-worn” rules that she could hardly overturn and the “mindless tradition” that imprisoned her life.

Fadwa’s extreme frustration and isolation continue to grow within the imprisonment of her household: “In this house, within its high walls that shut off the harem society from the outside world, where it was buried alive, my oppressed childhood, girlhood and a great part of my youth were spent” (36/ 40). Her oppression is fueled by her mother’s inability to protect her from the male-dominated and patriarchally-driven values that she, and her mother, have to endure. This ideology was not only propagated by the male figures in the house but was also championed by her paternal aunt al-Shaykha who “supported the father in enforcing discipline and social sanctions” (AbdelMotagally 207). Al-Shaykha was a stern enforcer of societal roles who scorned everything from Fadwa’s skirt length, her physical appearance, and her desire to sing and dance, which Fadwa felt were analogous to liberation and freedom from her imprisonment: “making music and singing was an outlet for expressing my repressed emotional needs during my girlhood and youth” (33/ 37). In many ways, as Noha AbdelMotagally argues, al-Shaykha came to represent “womanly ignorance and repression in the text” (207). This constant subjugation caused Fadwa to become alienated and withdrawn: “I felt accustomed to withdrawing into myself and becoming oblivious of my surroundings. Detachment fortified me” (50/ 58).

The struggles in Tuqan’s narrative do not necessarily imply a conflict between the “I” and the “We” per se, instead, as Sheetrit suggests: “Fadwa’s nuanced and intricate clashes within herself (on the one hand, to find her own voice, and on the other, not to lose herself in her individualistic tendencies) and against others in as much as they cause her to be ‘completely isolated from outside [of the house]’” (122). Essentially, her struggles are not

with the individuals as much as they are with the familial traditions and societal structures and practices that limit her freedom. From that space, Sheehri poses an integral question of “who or what constitutes the ‘other’ in the text” (122). One can argue that the base of much of Fadwa’s struggles and dilemmas starts with her conflicted relationship with her mother rooted in the lack of nurturance and absence that she experienced and augmented by her mother’s inability to understand her and protect her from familial and societal constraints. This, one can argue, places the mother as the “other” at the heart of Tuqan’s narrative.

Left with low self-esteem and self-image issues which stemmed from her festering childhood trauma with her mother, Fadwa finds solace and escape through her schooling and education. That is why, as a continuation of the oppression and subjugation she experiences, her spirit is crushed when her brother pulls her out of school and forbids her to leave the house as a form of punishment for her brief friendship with a boy in her neighborhood; one that Tuqan viewed as a replacement for the love denied to her by her mother: “here was the answer to the question Mother had denied me” (47/ 54). This leads her to resort to a suicide attempt as a form of escape and as an act of rebellion against her family’s tyranny. What made matters worse was the deep feeling of betrayal she felt due to her mother’s inability to refute the decision: “her individuality had been so debilitated by subjugation, she was unable to save me from the men’s decision” Tuqan laments (50/ 58). Thus, the feelings of injustice that she had experienced all her life are exacerbated as she starts to observe “her mother’s powerlessness or lack of struggle” (A. Rich, *Of Woman* 248). In examining the daughters’ experience of their mothers’ powerlessness, Chesler associates the alienation between mother and daughter with their mutual subservience. She builds on Rich’s notion of “matrophobia” which she defines as “the child’s fear of maternal powerlessness” (Chesler, *Woman’s Inhumanity* 209) and how it informs the daughters’ sense of being betrayed by their mothers whom they perceive as “ardent collaborators” (7) with the patriarchal system. This leads to

feelings of anger and resentment which are fueled by the deep and, often unconscious, “reaction to the injustice of women’s second-class status, and an implicit demand that a truly nurturant mother should struggle against her own (and her daughter’s) inferiority” (Herman and Lewis 148). Thus, the sense of powerlessness augments the feeling of hostility since “it arises [from mothers] whose special power is nurturance” (141).

The sense of powerlessness Fadwa felt from her mother was also subject to familial and societal oppression: “Alienation between mothers and daughters in its present extreme form is a rather recent historical development, related to the degradation of the mother’s role within the family” (Herman and Lewis 141). Fadwa saw glimpses of her mother’s love for life: “Mother’s love for life was boundless” (24/ 26) and she observed her mother’s love for “singing, music and dancing” (25/ 27) and parts of her liberation being “the first woman of her generation in Nablus to remove the veil” (25/ 27). However, this was all overshadowed by subjugation to societal constraints: “I sensed a hidden thread of unhappiness running through her. After I had grown up, I realized that the source of that hidden unhappiness was the social restraint and subjugation imposed on the women in our household” (22/ 25). Fadwa’s inability to find the needed nurturance from her mother was exacerbated by the oppressed condition of her mother which was a grave source of disappointment: “The oppressed condition of women is thus the ultimate, usually hidden, source of the daughter’s disappointment in her mother, and it fuels the daughter’s desire to separate and be different from her mother” (Herman and Lewis 152). Essentially, the lack of nurturance and the feeling of powerlessness prompt Fadwa’s need to separate and become autonomous from her mother. Separation, according to Andrea O’Reilly and Sharon Abbey, is essentially a daughter’s way of combating the original separation that mothers do as a way of disconnecting from their daughters and “seeing them as a society will,” so rather than strengthen their daughters with nurture, they “breach their trust leaving them weakened and

adrift” (10). As a reaction, daughters “split themselves” and separate through various acts of rebellion.

Herman and Lewis assert that “the estrangement between mother and daughter reaches its peak during the daughter’s adolescent and early adult struggles to develop a satisfactory identity and an intimate relationship” (155). It is during this time that adolescent girls display the greatest contempt for their mothers, the greatest desire to be different from what their mothers represent, and the greatest fear that they will end up just like their mothers (matrophobia). Fadwa’s mother operates within the boundaries of “patriarchal motherhood” (Chesler, *Woman’s Inhumanity* 213) which, as the concept of matrophobia explains, causes Fadwa to fear inheriting her mother’s fate. This conflict causes an internal split within the self between a need for belonging and a desire to break free: “this can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of [her] mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free” (A. Rich, *Of Woman* 238). Thus, in a desire to “know where the mother ends and where the daughter begins, [Fadwa] performs ‘radical surgery’” (238) from her mother who, in her powerlessness, is unable to protect her from society’s rules and constraints.

Fadwa suffered a great deal during her adolescence with issues regarding her self-esteem, which as mentioned before, are rooted in the lack of nurturance she experienced as a child, and which reach their pinnacle during her adolescent years: “The seeds of low self-esteem were planted in my tender young soul. I developed the habit of walking with my head bowed, not daring to raise my eyes to the faces that met me morning and evening with scowling aversion” (49/ 56). O’Reilly and Abbey argue that it is during this critical time of adolescence, the mother-daughter connection plays a vital role in female empowerment. By affirming their daughters, she argues, they allow girls to “claim their power and self-worth in and through their female identity” (3). Fadwa’s mother not only did not nurture her as a child,

not defend her right to education, but she also mocked any ambition she had for creativity or for stepping outside the mold: “I would invariably be struck by her lack of response and by her calling [my enthusiasm] stupid bosh. She used that exact word. This would kill my fantasies and dispossess me of that mystery that always fascinated me” (42/ 47). In that way, her mother’s non-affirmation of her caused her feelings of low self-esteem which manifested a constant feeling of non-entity and worthlessness.

It was during this time that Fadwa experienced the splitting of the self, delineated in the dichotomy between being submissive and needing to rebel against her whole surroundings: “a perpetual conflict arose between two parts of myself, a self-defeated by repression, and the grim reality of life, giving me a split personality: one appearing submissively obedient, while the other was in such a thunderous state underneath the surface that it was almost destroying itself” (77/ 95). The “dual psyche of rebellion and submission within” (Mir 364) in Tuqan’s journey of constituting herself was highly motivated by her traumatic relationship with her mother and the suffocation of the social limitations that she experienced. To that end, she begins what AbdelMotagally (referencing Michel de Certeau) refers to as “transverse tactics” which allow “individuals and groups to manipulate the spaces in which they are constrained” (211). Fadwa always felt suffocated by what was imposed on her: “This isolation had been imposed upon me; I hadn’t chosen it of my own free will” (109/ 132). Thus, she finds refuge in her school (which she was forced to leave) and later in her books, her imagination, and her solitude, which gave her a much-needed “sense of security” (84/ 103) that she deeply yearned for and did not receive from her mother or others around her. In her way, through “transverse tactics,” she was able to clandestinely live “with the ideas to be found in books, isolated from the world of people” (107 / 131). Those tactics essentially challenged the familial and societal constraints and authority “by creating a space that allows the emergence of an individual and free self” (AbdelMotagally 211).

Fadwa was, arguably, turning the isolation and constraints that were imposed by the patriarchal society into a means of rebellion and self-discovery. This “strange [journey] of absence” (51 / 59) can be considered what Teresa de Lauretis refers to as “a psychic domain of disidentification” (127) which explains Fadwa’s splitting of her subjectivity by disrupting the norms and creating a space for rebellion against the dominance of the patriarchal constructs around her: “I was with the family when, in reality, I was far removed from them as possible. I lived in a private world they could not invade, a world closed to them that I never allowed any of them to discover” (50-51/ 58). Moreover, it gives birth to a self “that is located beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of patriarchal ideology and practice” (AbdelMotagally 212). Essentially, her solitude and “self-silencing” may be seen as “an extremely powerful form of public opposition, denoting rejection and even rebellion” (al-Nowaihi 479).

Fadwa’s path towards “disidentification” and carving out her identity comes through finding a voice. A poetic voice that her brother Ibrahim, the most notable Palestinian poet of the time, introduces her to upon his return to Nablus in 1929. Ibrahim’s return, after receiving his liberal education in Beirut, illuminated Fadwa’s otherwise abysmal world: “I clung to [him] with the tenacity of a drowning person to a lifeboat” (53/ 61). His broad-minded and kind demeanor and his genuine interest in her felt like a saving grace and it was, arguably, the first time she ever felt truly seen: “all his life his penetrating eyes saw into the far reaches of my heart, sensing its misery at its emptiness, and feeling its ambitions, which he tried to help me fulfill. He was the only one who really saw me and noticed my existence” (67/ 81). Ibrahim took Fadwa under his wing, guiding her first attempts at composing poetry and even taking her to live with him for a while in Jerusalem, away from the repressive atmosphere she was experiencing at home. It was during this time that Fadwa truly blossomed: “he was the psychological healer that saved me from inner collapse” (53/ 62). Ibrahim enjoyed listening

to Fadwa's singing, music, and playing the flute and always rewarded her with words of love and affection. Essentially, he came to fill the vacuum of love and nurturance that she so deeply yearned for since her infancy: "he was deeply concerned about my psychological rebirth and the development of my natural inclination to realize my latent abilities" (67/ 81).

Ibrahim came to represent a surrogate for Fadwa's mother. Marianne Hirsch notes that, in some cases, "maternal absence makes possible the maternal idealization that propels daughters into her allegiance with their brothers" (75). Her mother's failure to understand and nurture her caused her to see herself as a misfit and consequently seek support, kindness, and tenderness from her brother. Hirsch draws on Freud's concept of "family romances" or "plots which explore the consequences both of maternal repression and paternal alliance" (57). Essentially, daughters attempt to counteract the metaphorical loss of the mother by replacing "authoritative fathers with other men who, endowed with nurturing qualities, might offer an alternative" (57). Hirsch argues that this daughterly fantasy can also be analyzed through Rich's "the man-who-would-understand" or the man who would provide maternal nurturance and paternal power: "if a person is deeply humiliated and made into a nobody, she will change into a twisted creature, unless she finds someone to love-and shower her with tenderness" (53 / 61). Often, this man takes the form of the brother who is not only nurturing but also provides "access to issues of legitimacy" (Hirsch 58) as Ibrahim will do for Fadwa by validating her poetic voice. Thus, it is the mother's absence and negligence that creates the space for the brother to fulfill. Contextually, Fadwa's need for surrogacy comes into play not only as a reaction to her mother's absence but also as a "complex interaction of maternal speech and silence, as well mother-daughter connection, and separation" (58).

Not only was Ibrahim's nurturance pivotal to Fadwa, but he also offered her a space for her poetic voice to be revealed and her rebirth to occur: "my absorption in my new world taught me the taste of happiness. I was immersed in the act of creating myself,

building myself up anew” (63/ 76). This creative outlet provides Fadwa a way out of her isolation and serves as an escape from the imprisonment of the harem, the familial and gendered dynamics, and the emotional deprivation she feels from her mother. Poetry served as her way out of “the cramped confines of patriarchal space” (Showalter qtd. in Abudi 106). It was Ibrahim who nurtured her budding talent by introducing her to various poets, explaining the-meaning of their poems, “verse by verse” (57/ 68), and listening to her recitations daily. Fadwa is elated with her new education as it brings her back to the schooling days that she lost: “I was returning to exercise books, pencils, studies and memorizing; I was returning to my lost paradise” (58/ 69). Tuqan’s first name Fadwa appears in the narrative for the first time as she put it in the notebook she was using while Ibrahim teaches her about poetry:

Name – Fadwa Tuqan
 Class – (I crossed out this word, writing in its place:
 Teacher – Ibrahim Tuqan)
 Subject – Learning Poetry
 School – The House. (58/ 70)

Malti-Douglas argues that “since the name in its first appearance is directly associated with poetry, it means that the official persona to which it refers also becomes from that point on attached to and defined through poetry” (“Introduction” 6). Moreover, since her birthdate was essentially a source of trauma for her by being forgotten by her mother, one could argue that Fadwa was creating her own birth or rebirth: “the acquisition of the name, concomitant as it is with the acquisition of poetry, signals a type of rebirth for the heroine” (6). Writing her name is “a means by which to revise one’s own identity and reject imposed descriptions of the self” (Childers and Hentzi 199). This construction of identity or rebirth sharply contrasts with how Fadwa felt about herself and her identity in the past:

I became a stranger to myself. In my silent contemplation, I would repeat:

‘Who am I? Who am I?’ I would repeat my name over and over in my

thoughts, but my name would seem foreign and meaningless to me. At that point any connection I had to my name, myself, or my surroundings would be cut, leaving me submerged in a very curious state of non-presence and nothingness. (51/ 59)

From that space, one can argue that Fadwa's moment of epiphany --of self-realization and self-actualization-- happens when she, literally and metaphorically, sees her name in association with poetry. This constitutes her conscious production of the self: "they were not just words to me; they were the suns and the moons. Before them, my life had come to a standstill, not moving with time" (58/ 70). Jane Gallop draws on the work of Jacques Lacan to explain the occurrence of an epiphany through psychoanalysis: "[t]he mirror stage is a decisive moment. Not only does the self issue from the mirror stage, but so does 'the body in bits and pieces.' This moment is the source not only for what follows but also for what precedes. It produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction" (121). The importance of the epiphany, or the moment of great revelation, is that it combines what occurred and what is about to occur in the quest for autonomy. In that way, Fadwa's epiphany ushers the way for her split self to begin to reconcile on her journey of autonomy through the act of self-realization and self-actualization, manifest in her poetic voice.

Fadwa's venture into poetry helps reconcile "the duality of submission and rebellion" (Mir 365) and the conflict between nurturance and autonomy. Moreover, it serves in her process of subject formation and self-realization. Psychoanalytic theories relating to creativity tend to identify "the place of the mother as the very absence which lies at the point of linguistic origin" (Hirsch 52). For Freud, creative writing, such as poetry in the case of Fadwa, materializes from dissatisfaction and lack of maternal fulfillment: "A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer the memory of an earlier

experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds fulfillment in the creative work” (Freud 155). Similarly, for Lacan, the language used in creative work depends on an irreparable and fundamental breach: “a primordial absence and loss which comes to be located in the space of the maternal” (Hirsch 52). In that way, one can argue, that Fadwa’s self-formation through the medium of language (her poetry), serves as her autonomous act.

Through poetry, Fadwa was able to reconcile some of her feelings of non-entity and worthlessness that she had harbored growing up. Moreover, her strong motivation for self-actualization, fueled by the lack of nurturance and her drive to establish her individual and autonomous voice, cemented poetry in her life: “Poetry became the sole preoccupation, awake or asleep, of my spirit and mind. It became the love that remained throughout my life a mystical love” (63/ 76). In many ways, her creative outlet became the catalyst in her process of self-realization: “I was immersed in the act of creating myself. Building myself anew” (63/ 76). Fadwa’s initial poetic expression was through composing *ritha’* or elegies, taught to her by Ibrahim. Elegies for male members of the family (especially brothers and fathers) were considered a standard genre for female poets in the tradition of classical Arabic literature, even before Islam. In that way, as Malti-Douglas asserts: “her place in the canon is laid out for her. Accepting it means accepting her female literary role” (*Woman’s Body* 171). True to that expectation, Fadwa tried to “clothe [herself] in Ibrahim’s poetical robes and to imitate him by writing patriotic verse” (71/ 87). However, her iterations in that genre, though well received, did not spring out of “a true political consciousness or sentiment” (72/ 87).

Fadwa’s journey with establishing her poetic voice was not without conflict for she had to overcome challenging societal and cultural obstacles that were rooted in a patriarchal structure. Firstly, it was hard for her to establish her voice and identity in the “gender-

polarized culture” (Abudi 108) she lived in. Fadwa was faced with the “double jeopardy” (107) of having to struggle with the familial and cultural reactions to her being a female and a poet. Living for a while with Ibrahim in Jerusalem, which Tuqan refers to as a “free society,” had allotted her the freedom to learn, experience, and explore. Moreover, she felt her talent being validated, not only by Ibrahim but also by being published in newspapers. In addition, as her act of liberation in carving out her voice, she abandoned the classical, traditional style, which Ibrahim had insisted on, in favor of a more modern style of free verse, inspired by Arab poets in America. It was during that time that her personal brand of poetry saw its peak, publishing under the pseudonym “Dananeer,” the kind of love poetry that elucidated her intrinsic self. The concept of love, thus far, had been associated with feelings of “shame and disgrace” that were “imprinted upon [her] from her infancy” (73/ 89). Therefore, by writing about them, she felt truly liberated. This bout of freedom in Jerusalem invigorated Fadwa because of its sharp contrast to what she was experiencing in her familial surrounding. That is why, upon her return to Nablus, Fadwa gains a new perspective on the plethora of horrors she had been experiencing in the imprisonment of her family life: “I went back even deeper into my profound inner exile, into journeying inside myself” (105/ 128). Essentially, she began to fathom why her mother and family were emotionally separated from her:

Perhaps my prominence in the family as a novel personality, differing from the norm, led [them] to fear this would end up in a headstrong revolt against the established rules. The mark of the house was the mold into which the girl’s personality was poured: the same mold all the females of the family were forced into. (105-06/ 129)

Moreover, she began to comprehend the intensity of how family life was subjugating females and converting them into victims: “the reality of life in that bottled-up harem was

humiliating submission. Here the female lived out her dark, pinched existence. Looking around me, I saw nothing but faceless victims with no independent life” (106/ 129).

Women in her family, in addition to the educated women in her social milieu, try to stifle her effort in becoming a poet by shaking her confidence and questioning her abilities. In fact, Fadwa was repeatedly accused that her brother is the one writing her poetry for her. This leads Fadwa to firmly believe that her familial position was not conducive to “participate actively in the kind of life necessary for a poet” (107/ 131). Tuqan, arguably referencing Virginia Woolf, asserts that due to the lack of any private life within her family milieu, it was long before she could have “a room of [her] own” (106/ 130). In her seminal feminist work *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf asserts: “All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point--a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4). This declaration by Woolf is a metaphor for women’s marginalization and lack of opportunity--not potential--under the patriarchal and social structures. Essentially, the unjust lack of opportunity is conducive to women’s regression, inequality, and isolation.

In her narrative, Tuqan makes the assertion of what she lacked by highlighting her financial dependence and confined personal space on one hand, and by reiterating the effects of her imprisonment and isolation on her poetic voice. Moreover, Tuqan is aware that to become proficient in the politically driven poetry that is expected of her, she must be well-versed in the realities of the political situation of her country. She cites the general lack of education of the women around her and her inability to leave the imprisonment of her house or experience interacting with the political milieu around them, as a major hindrance. When her father often reprimanded her for not producing patriotic poetry and living up to the legacy of her brother Ibrahim, who had died tragically, she would silently protest:

How and with what right or logic does father ask me to compose political poetry when I am shut up inside these walls? I don't sit with men, I don't listen to their heated discussions, nor do I participate in the turmoil of life on the outside. I'm still not even acquainted with the face of my own country since I am not allowed to travel. (107/ 132)

This interplay between what Tuqan was intrinsically drawn to in her poetry versus what was expected of her presented another hindrance in her path. In examining Tuqan's poetic work, Magda al-Nowaihi asserts that she was expected to merge with the collective and focus on political and social issues pertaining to the Palestinian cause. Yet that was against what she identified with: "[Fadwa] finds that she is unable to write poetry addressing public and political issues and inclined toward personal poetry dealing with her private emotions, her sorrows, and desires, most often romantic and erotic ones" (481). Her brother Ibrahim had reiterated this sentiment and admonished her continuously to focus on collective rather than individual topics: "Sister, people aren't interested in our personal feelings. Don't forget this fact" (70/ 85). Yet the self-aware Fadwa understood that this was not a true representation of herself: "It would appear that my melancholy, introverted nature, which always made me withdraw completely within myself, was stronger than Ibrahim's excellent advice. There seems to be a certain immutability in our natural dispositions" (70/ 85). This was quite problematic for Fadwa as it went against her family's—and society's—expectations, which geared her toward being the spokesperson for the Palestinian people. In turn, it presented an internal struggle for Fadwa in trying to reconcile the duality of her individual project with the collective goal.

Fadwa found herself divided again by the polarity of "an individual self that seeks autonomy and individualism and a relational self that seeks affiliation with a group and being part of a collective identity" (Abudi 108-09). Essentially, she was haunted by her

inability “to get away from the subjective realm of the self” (108-09). Fadwa’s personal poetry was her way of carving her own voice and expressing her intrinsic self: “My tendency to romanticism would pull me deep into myself again” (131/ 159). This contradicted the patriotic aspirations laid out by her father which placed her under the pressure of becoming a national spokesperson. Al-Nowaihi argues that relinquishing her personal brand of poetry also presented a threat of returning to “her earlier days of insignificance and nothingness” (481) as it was seen by her as a step away from the self-liberation she yearned for, especially considering the feeling of insignificance that she suffered as a child. To that end, she longed to find a voice that broke the male-dominated and highly patriarchal literary convention with her own brand of “brave and defiant” poetry that explored “intimate feelings and experiences” that she shared with the public (482).

Fadwa begins to feel creatively liberated after her father’s death in 1948. Though she did compose patriotic poetry and take part in a plethora of political activities, she always felt that she lacked the ability “to commit herself to a particular ideology” (125/ 151). Fadwa recognized the subjectivity in life and believed that it should translate into her poetry as well: “a poet is an individual like all others and represents all human beings in their intrinsic nature. Thus, my poetry writing remained bound to my unpredictable moods” (125/ 151). Ironically, however, after the 1967 defeat, Fadwa reverts willingly and wholeheartedly to the patriotic and nationalistic narrative. This return does not threaten her sense of individualism and her search for self since she could “finally identify with the entire nation’s powerlessness and vulnerability, which reflect her own, she can now sing their collective sorrow” (al-Nowaihi 484). By that time, she had already established her own voice and independence “so that merging with the collective did not have to threaten her sense of self or her unique poetic voice” (484). Fadwa’s subsequent poetry became a remarkable *mélange* of the personal and the collective.

Fadwa's political consciousness and awareness sprang from living through and narrating a highly tumultuous time in her country's history when her personal journey became closely connected with the history of Palestine through her patriotic poetry. Her feminist consciousness, on the other hand, sprang from her very personal suffering: "the repression, discrimination, and deprivation that she endured during her childhood and adolescence" (Abudi 110). Through this journey of personal suffering, Tuqan introspects through the mundane and everyday events of her life to examine the fragmentation of her inherited, social, and intrinsic selves under the familial, societal, and cultural structures that sought to mold her autonomous self. Essentially, Tuqan's narrative portrays an awareness of the variations of a divided self: "the text bespeaks of the plurality of selves as the basis for Fadwa's self-representation" (Sheertrit 122). Those selves, which were all mediated through her primal relationship with her mother, are in a perpetual conflict between diverse dichotomies in a constant search for the nurturance she never received. Tuqan never really pinpoints a singularity of the self and, in the narrative, delineates her cognizance of it: "This is life: every moment of one's life one is reborn, leaving behind a personality different from the present one" (176/ 217).

Fadwa's self-formation becomes her act of liberation, especially considering her repeated declarations, throughout her childhood and adulthood, of her inability to defend herself against the variety of injustices she encountered. Chief among her hardships is the conflictual relationship she had with her mother. The lack of nurturance she experienced prompted her low self-esteem and feelings of non-entity and worthlessness, which stayed with her and informed her relations with herself and with others. Moreover, feelings of anger towards her mother's powerlessness and inability to protect her and fight for her under the societal and familial structures crushed Fadwa's spirit and silenced her voice for a long time.

Fadwa's relationship with her mother, compounded with her imprisonment and feelings of despair, subjugation, and repression in her home and family milieu left a lasting imprint on her soul. Her autonomy and subsequent liberation came through words. Essentially, "by narrating the story of her 'inability' to speak up for herself, she has negated her silence and has liberated herself in language" (Golley 128). To that end, the act of liberation, for Tuqan, is through verbal expression. Not only through poetry, but through the act of narrating her autobiographical self. In that way, one can argue that her "private" and "public" feminist consciousness was elucidated through her poetic voice. As Sidonie Smith asserts: "consciousness is contextualized rather than privatized" (396). In other words, through the act of narrating her personal struggle, she is contextualizing it within the plight of the Palestinian people. As the narrative delineates, however, that was not an easy take for Tuqan, not only because of the highly patriarchal context which frames women's roles and prescribes their place in society but also because of how women "internalize the social contract and the ensuing marginal status of women in the patriarchal order" (Tzoreff 73). In that way, the act of writing itself becomes an act of autonomy and liberation. Through the sharing of their stories, women place themselves in the public sphere and subsequently break cultural norms and gender classifications: "the womanly 'self' that was revealed in the personal narratives of Arab women has become a testimony to their now irrepressible need not only to express themselves but also to be heard" (74). Ultimately, rather than being subjugated by the events of her life, she controls them through her narrative. Her personal narrative is a private and public, personal and collective remonstrance against the motherly, familial, and societal structures that tried to mold her and predetermine her path in life. Breaking through the "walls of silence" enforced upon women, she ceased her marginalization and shifted herself from object to subject and, in so doing, found her autonomous voice.

VII. Latifa al-Zayyat

A. Identifying the Self: The National Self

In exploring al-Zayyat's coming-of-age novel, which delves into the development of the protagonist's identity, the research will analyze how the protagonist Layla's story becomes a trope for the nascence of nationalist and feminist consciousness under a patriarchal family structure that is motivated and fueled by the *usul*, rules, and debilitating fundamentals; a dogmatic society whose morality is drenched in hypocrisy, mediated through her conflictual relationship with a submissive mother who propagates the rubrics of patriarchy.

Latifa al-Zayyat's magnum opus *The Open Door* cannot be analyzed without contextualizing it with the author's historical and literary contributions and her personal journey of self-formation. Al-Zayyat's journey is highly influenced and inspired by her national struggle, essentially cementing a link between the public and the private subject formation. Al-Zayyat captures a seminal place in the social fabric of Egyptian society. Her participation in the national liberation movement against colonialism and her political activism is defined by her rejection of "all forms of imperialist hegemony" (Abudi 144). Al-Zayyat's struggle for national liberation, women's rights, and freedom of expression began as early as 1934, when she was eleven years old, standing on her balcony in al-Mansoura, and witnessing the armed police massacre of twenty-four Egyptians who were protesting the British imperial presence in Egypt, which she later describes in her memoir:

I trembled with feelings of powerlessness, of misery, of oppression, as the bullets of the police killed twenty-four demonstrators that day. I screamed for my inability to act, I screamed for my inability to go down to the street to stop the bullets from coming out of the black guns. I shed the child in

me and the young woman came of age — prematurely — for I encountered knowledge that went beyond the home to include all of the homeland. My future fate was decided at that moment. (al-Zayyat, *The Search* 43)

One can argue that it was at that moment that al-Zayyat made the conscious decision that her life and work “must be one of commitment to national causes” (al-Nowaihi 494). It was not long after this pivotal incident that al-Zayyat joined the anti-British demonstrations that were filling the streets of Egypt. This continued well into her undergraduate years at Cairo University where she became highly involved with the Communist leftist groups and, in 1946, became secretary general of the National Committee of Students and Workers, which was highly influential in the national struggle for independence (Elsadda 97). Being chosen as a woman for that prominent position at the time is a testament to her outstanding abilities as well as the progressive nature of the movement itself. This involvement at such a young age formed not only the political and feminist consciousness of al-Zayyat but also shaped her confidence and inspired her fighting spirit: “I became politically militant. It was during those years that the timid girl, who had carried her plump body as if it were a sin, developed into a group leader: daring, confronting, arguing, making rapid decisions, and thriving with pride in her abilities” (al-Zayyat, “On Political” 250).

From that space, al-Zayyat understood that the lines between personal and national liberation are often blurred, and one can never really ascertain which ignites the other. To that end, she combined her leftist politics and her feminist activism and, in 1945, cofounded The League of University and Institutes’ Young Women to empower and inspire young girls at the grassroots level (Elsadda 97). Moreover, she participated in numerous activities in favor of women’s rights and equality in her endeavor to defend the nation’s integrity, which led to her imprisonment in 1949 after being charged with conspiring to overthrow the regime

on account of her affiliation with the communist party. This fighting spirit gave her a sense of self that is inspired by the whole: “[one does] not really find himself, does not become whole unless he first loses himself in a whole, a totality greater than his narrow, individual self” (al-Zayyat, *The Search* 100). Essentially, al-Zayyat’s personal journey is highly influenced by the interplay between the individual and the collective aspirations: “one can only find oneself by initially losing it into a much wider issue than one’s own subjectivity, into a reality bigger than one’s own” (al-Zayyat qtd. in Amireh). Through her personal and public work, al-Zayyat was always at the heart of Egypt’s struggles and represented “a rare model among Arab women who engage in a struggle for liberation” (al-Bahrawi 31). By developing a self that is “liberated from the prisonhouse of the self” (al-Zayyat, “On Political” 247), al-Zayyat sought to balance the personal and the private, the individual and the collective. Throughout her life, al-Zayyat continued to propagate her belief in the intertwining of the private sphere and the public sphere, and always resisted considering one in isolation from the other. Her inspiration for women is cemented in her locus among the Arab nationalist and feminist tradition and narrative. Her political activism and national struggle elevate her literary career, along with other prominent Arab women writers who “set out to explore the feminine psyche that had been *terra incognita* throughout the history of Arabic literature because that literature had been almost exclusively the product of male writers” (Zeidan 139).

B. *The Open Door*

As evident in her journey and by her personal account, al-Zayyat asserts that her “coming of age” was highly influenced by the experiences that went “beyond the home to include all of the homeland” (al-Zayyat, *The Search* xx). This triangulation not only shapes al-Zayyat’s self-formation but also inspires her protagonist Layla’s journey in her seminal

novel. According to al-Zayyat, these “three levels of meaning are all interwoven into the structure and the texture of the novel forming a harmonious whole” (“On Political” 256). At its core, *The Open Door* is a story about the development of the self, rebelling against the institutional oppression of women in a society that is marked by traditional as well as colonial bondage. In that way, the three levels of meaning are told through Layla’s coming-of-age, within the home and in service of the homeland.

In her analysis of the *Bildungsroman* or coming-of-age novels, as a form of fiction, Bonnie Hoover Braendlin asserts that “the emphasis of a *Bildungsroman* on repressive environmental factors and on the possibilities of transformation offered by individual choice make it an attractive genre to modern women intent on expressing female awakening and consciousness-raising and on proclaiming new, self-defined identities” (77). In the coming-of-age novels during the 1950s and onwards, Arab women writers portrayed the struggles of women, in their journey of defining themselves as individuals, within familial and societal constraints, with patriarchal and gender oppression as the main themes of these narratives. Moreover, they also tackled how family relationships and traditional societal values affect women’s individual selves: “Rebellion against a mother who embodies passive domesticity – marriage and motherhood – is a natural and inevitable step in the heroine’s self-development” (Abudi 140-41). Thus, the triangulation encompasses not only the interplay between individual ideals and societal realities but also the fight for national liberation as a key catalyst for the heroine to find her personal liberation from the constraints of family, society, and gender--essentially, a path to self-realization and self-fulfillment.

It is from that space that al-Zayyat writes *The Open Door*. Not only does al-Zayyat portray the “three-way struggle: a feminist battle for women’s freedom; a Marxist battle against middle-class morality and the primacy of the family as a locus of tradition and power; and a larger anti-colonial battle” (Elsadda 102), she also re-writes women’s role within it.

Essentially, by articulating Layla's struggle for selfhood, al-Zayyat "not only address[es] [women's] traditional muteness and/or marginality in the national script but, in doing so, [she] rewrite[es] their role within it" (Boehmer 108). In that way, al-Zayyat "herald[s] the explosion of feminist writing in the Arab world and the entry of female Arab writers into the modern literary canon" (Booth, "About" 362-363).

A canon in literature or the arts, as Marilyn Booth defines it, is not only "emblematic of the dominant ideology, values and organization of social forces in a given society," but also produces "a vision of 'the way things ought to be'" and aims to "name what is central to cultural and political definition" ("About" 363). By looking at what is central, writers like al-Zayyat have been able to examine the social and political marginalization of women, as well as their marginality as Arab women writers of their time. This marginalization, both as subjects and writers of subjects, allowed them to shape the national narratives and re-write them to include women's struggles and active roles in their private and public spheres. In that way, *The Open Door* gains its canonical status to become a "*geel* (generation) novel, one that attempts to express the concerns of a rising generation" (Kahf 227) because, within the context of its time, al-Zayyat was able to deconstruct the social fabric and "confront issues of personal freedom and sexuality in the context of received social expectations and the constraints of political inertia, economic travail, and class" (Booth, "About" 361-362). Thus, capturing the female coming-of-age and sexual awakening experience of adolescence and post-adolescence, under the rigid societal dogmas of the time, was bold, progressive, and deserving of its seminal status among contemporary Arabic literature.

In analyzing *The Open Door*, one cannot ignore the apparent autobiographical undertone within the narrative. Whilst the narrative is not an autobiography, by al-Zayyat's own account, she did set out to write a novel about her undergraduate years, which set her life "on a new course" ("On Political" 250). Originally titled *Arba' sanawat* (Four years), al-

Zayyat had first attempted to capture the formation of the self through the interplay between the individual and the collective where the ‘open door’ was “the opening up to the people and to the homeland” (“On Political” 251). Thus, al-Zayyat is writing from a very personal and subjective point of view. One can argue, therefore, that being an omniscient third-person narrator asserts her own consciousness in the storytelling and channels parts of her feminist and national consciousness through Layla’s story (Sharif 43). As Booth asserts: “al-Zayyat has called [*The Open Door*] an attempt to capture her own vision of the world as she was growing into adulthood” (“About” 375). This vision, which shaped al-Zayyat’s narrative, is based on the notion that literary works are “products of their age, whose conditions determine the writer’s vision; products of the people of that age, whose sensibility forms the circle of reception, while the values of those people constitute the common ground from which the writer begins the attempt to change these values” (al-Zayyat, “On Political” 254).

The Open Door, which was written at a time of “rising revolutionary tide” (Kahf 227) and captures the highly volatile decade of Egypt’s history from 1946-1956, earns its canonical status to become a *geel* (generation) novel because it captures the feelings, struggles, and aspirations of the generation. As novelist Hala Badri asserts in reminiscence: “Our home witnessed many conversations about the boldness of its themes. What arrested [the adults] was not the point that choosing the way one lives privately is inseparable from public commitment, but rather the courageous conclusions that emerge through the dialogues. The women around me were quietly thankful to this woman who had been able to express an experience that they could not articulate out loud though it was common among them” (qtd. in Booth, “About” 362).

What gives *The Open Door* its uniqueness and allows it to resonate with people is al-Zayyat’s personal mantra of intertwining the private and the public spheres and never advocating for one in isolation from the other. In that way, the private and the public are

closely interwoven so that Layla's coming-of-age parallels "Egypt's own coming-of-age" (McLarney 189). As Booth asserts: "every advance or retreat in the political realm is matched by one in Layla's personal realm and vice versa—one realm does not precede the other" ("About" 375). Al-Zayyat does so by deconstructing the social fabric of society to delineate the intricacies of a woman's fight for autonomy and weaving the private realm of Layla vis-à-vis the social, political, and cultural intricacy of the time. In so doing, she tells a bigger story about the candid plight of women's emancipation in mid-century Egypt. This social critique, which is emblematic of women's writing, was characterized by a "dailiness" that captures the seemingly mundane and everyday matters which socialize and shape women's consciousness. Moreover, using Egyptian colloquial Arabic for much of the dialogue, which was not used or highly regarded at the time by the writing intelligentsia, fortifies the realism of her characters and her storytelling: "[the] dominance of the colloquial enhances al-Zayyat's portrayal of the mundane, of the everyday as a political arena, more specifically of the interrelationships between the gendering of expectations and behavior" (Booth, "About" 378).

The Open Door's plot unfolds in the period from 1946-1956, which encompasses the rebellion against British imperialism, the Free Officer's Revolution of 1952, the nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the 1956 Tripartite Aggression that followed. It is against this charged backdrop that al-Zayyat chronicles the psychological, social, and political coming-of-age of Layla, a middle-class girl in Cairo at the height of the call to national resistance over the continued British control: "The novel parallels Layla's development with the nation, tracing the trajectory of Layla the young middle-class girl to the new Egyptian woman" (Abdel Nasser 53). Al-Zayyat starts off the novel by diving into the national consciousness that erupted in Cairo's Sulayman Pasha Street in 1946 due to the mass demonstrations against British rule and enters the personal consciousness of Layla, daughter

of Muhammed Effendi Sulayman. The name replication thus foreshadows the parallelism that al-Zayyat will draw on to delineate the effect of the political realm on the personal realm of the protagonist. Moreover, going from the macro level of what is happening on the streets to the micro level of how this reverberates within the confines of Layla's home, echoes how al-Zayyat will tackle the interplay between the public and the private spheres. The family in this case delineated "as a microcosm of the social order and political struggle" (Elsadda 102).

Through the opening chapter, al-Zayyat portrays the charged dynamics of what is happening on the streets as well as the rules and regulations that govern the microcosm of the family and their effects on the private, gender, and political consciousness of Layla. A "contemporary of her own author" (Moore 43), Layla is eleven years old in the opening chapter of the novel as the family reacts to her brother Mahmoud's participation in the demonstrations that are filling the streets. The bullet he receives, and his general participation anger their authoritarian father, worry their concerned mother, and ignite Layla's pride as she decides to follow in his footsteps: "When I get bigger, I'll show those Englishmen! I'll carry a gun, I really will, and I'll shoot them all" (12/ 20)⁴. Being only eleven at the time, feelings of pride do not necessarily propel Layla's patriotic self into formation just yet, but they trickle down and translate into a self that aims to achieve and succeed; "she must triumph" (14/ 23) she told herself as she sat in school. Al-Zayyat contrasts this in the narrative sequence with Layla's mother's reaction to her accidentally breaking a vase: "Her mother let out a scream, and went on screaming, as if something really horrid had happened, like a fire breaking out in the building. She bore down on Layla, face red with anger, and slapped both of her palms hard. Wiping the sweat from her forehead, she wailed, 'What am I going to do with you? But what can I do with such rotten luck? God made you a real problem child-- may

⁴ Throughout the thesis, when citing the primary sources, the first page number indicated will be of the English translation followed by the page number of the Arabic original. In this case English translation by Marilyn Booth and original Arabic by Latifa al-Zayyat.

He take you and give us some peace!” (15/ 24). Thus, through the opening scene, al-Zayyat sets the tone for the interplay between the highly charged private and public spheres which will come to influence the consciousness and self-formation of her protagonist.

Layla’s immediate conflict is not with the British rule in Egypt. Her real battle is with the internal dynamics of her family life, manifested in the *usul* or rules, decorum, and fundamentals that are propagated and reverberated by her submissive and powerless mother: “the *usul* is a recurrent idea that underlines the narrative and becomes a key target in Layla’s fight against middle-class morality. Rules of propriety are the instruments of Layla’s oppression and the target of her rebellion” (Elsadda 102-03). The values and rules of the *usul* are constantly being drilled into Layla by her mother, whose daily mantra is “whoever lives by the fundamentals can’t possibly go wrong” (23/ 33). These fundamentals control every action Layla makes in her daily life and, through her mother, govern her every move. The significance of the fundamentals is that they constitute the rules and the codes that govern patriarchal societies and, as de Lauretis asserts: “Whoever defines the code or the context, has control. All which accept that context abdicate the possibility of redefining it” (3). In blindly following those codes and transmitting them to her daughter, Layla’s mother not only becomes a collaborator in their advancement, but she also relinquishes any possibility of redefining them. Essentially, by being a “guarantor of a desired social order” (Lawler 56), her mothering becomes the epitome of patriarchal mothering.

This type of mothering plays a major role in the process of female subordination by molding daughters into being “obedient participants in the hierarchy, transmitting values of the dominant culture and perpetuat[ing] hierarchical societal arrangements” (Trebilcot 1). The societal arrangements or “mechanisms of socialization,” as de Lauretis argues, are “inherently oppressive to women” (166) and understanding them is essential to understanding the arrival and formation of selfhood. Layla’s matrophobia, in turn, never

allows her to see her mother as a role model and conversely rejects her submissiveness and weakness which exemplify the “harem mentality” (76/ 94). Layla vows never to become like her mother but instead yearns to be like her teacher: “To grow older. To become like her mother. No! To become like the history supervisor who helped their teachers, the woman with the broad pale forehead, who held her head so erect” (20/ 29). Thus, Layla does not feel empowered through identification with her mother and sees strength in women who are educated and dignified. Essentially, for empowerment to occur, mothers must relinquish their patriarchal mothering and instead model strength by practicing “relational and resistant” mothering (O’Reilly and Abbey 3-4) without the fear of being construed as subversive by their patriarchal societies. By telling their daughters the real truths about the obstacles they might face instead of asking them for blind obedience, and by instructing them on how to survive the patriarchal rules instead of collaborating with them, mothers allow their daughters to “find the courage to overcome race and gender barriers” (Brown-Guillory 191).

Al-Zayyat uses all the novel’s dramatic moments to illustrate and deconstruct the culture’s definitions of female experience and gender assignments. The formation of Layla’s selfhood is influenced by gender socialization which is propagated by her mother and affected by the *usul* and fundamentals that cement the discrimination against women since different rules apply to men and women. Layla learns this difference very early on, under the watchful eyes of her mother. When Layla starts menstruating, her mother becomes very apprehensive and melancholy and Layla hears her authoritarian father weep like a child and call to God to shield them from what’s to come: “Protect us, Lord, Protect us! Shield us from harm” (21/ 30). The next day she is surprised to learn that her father has limited her movement and informed her, through her mother, that she is not allowed to go anywhere unattended. Layla learns very quickly what it means to be a female and comes to understand that “to reach womanhood was to enter a prison where the confines of one’s life were clearly

and decisively fixed. At its door stood her father, her brother, and her mother” (21/ 31).

Layla’s mother takes no measure against this imprisonment and the relationship between mother and daughter becomes highly volatile as Layla feels constantly watched and oppressed by her mother who never stops reprimanding her: “Now it was her mother’s turn to play a never-ending role. And she performed it so assiduously that now, whenever Layla heard steps, she would automatically throw a glance behind her, in expectation of her mother’s harsh words of blame for whatever it was she had most recently done, whatever error she had supposedly committed or problem she had caused” (22-23/ 32).

Layla would never know what that something would be or what constituted “improper, “inappropriate,” “out of bounds,” and “not befit the daughter of respectable folk” (23/ 33). Even if she wanted to follow the rules, Layla never knew what they were. If she refrained from greeting guests, her mother would accuse her of being “a recluse – [who doesn’t] like anyone” and if she did greet them, she would be scolded for not conversing properly. If she spoke up, her mother would rebuke her for “interfering in adults’ business” and if she stepped out, she would be reproached for not being inviting to the guests. If ever she complained to her mother and asked what to do, her mother’s only response would be “there’s something, dear, called the fundamentals – the rules, the right way to behave” (23/ 33). Thus, Layla’s mother’s reaction to her entrance into adolescence and womanhood was enforcing the patriarchal rules of engagement relegated by her authoritarian father. O’Reilly and Abbey assert that the loss of female selfhood usually occurs in adolescence and argue that a close mother-daughter connection is essential for female empowerment: “Mothers need to nurture girls’ self-esteem by affirming and celebrating the feminine in everyday practice and ritual, to allow girls to claim power and gain self-worth in and through their female identity” (3). In not receiving this nurturance from her mother, Layla not only feels imprisoned and disempowered, but she also feels alienated in her own body: “she walked as

if bound in heavy chains, dragging her body behind her, shoulders hunched, and head pitched forward as if determined to get where she was going with the utmost haste before she could possibly attract the glances of others” (25/ 34). Essentially, the empowerment of daughters depends on the “deconstruction of patriarchal motherhood” (O’Reilly and Abbey 9).

Patriarchal motherhood and the propagation of *usul* and fundamentals extend to the rules of behavior when it comes to marriage, which al-Zayyat is adamant to portray in her narrative. The word *usul* not only refers to the rules of engagement in society but its origin in Arabic refers to “property, proprietorship, and financial assets” (McLarney 190). In deconstructing the social fabric, al-Zayyat portrays how propriety is closely linked to “ideas of ownership” which inform marriage agreements. Layla’s education in the *usul* of marriage, which is informed by gender assignments and class categorizations, begins post-adolescence as she enters the “marriage market.” Layla learns very quickly from her mother and her aristocratic and rich aunt how women are assessed in society to ascertain their marriageability as if they were auctioned in the market: “This girl is on the brink of marriage now. And like any girl—if she doesn’t dress right, she won’t bring any sort of price in the market” (39/ 50). Though her mother believed she was still too young for marriage, she makes it clear that getting married is Layla’s only path to security, stability, and shelter from a bad reputation. Informed by the *usul*, her mother reiterates society’s morality that men are the source of economic security: “my sister, really tried with the girl, tried and tried, but it was no use. A hundred times we must have said to her, ‘Honey, the only thing that can shame a man is his pocket’” (38/ 49). By attaching economic control and subsequent power and influence to the male figure, Layla’s mother is essentially socializing her into submission by teaching her that “the tricks of surviving in the patriarchy [are] by pleasing and attaching [herself] to powerful and economically viable men” (A. Rich, *On Lies* 91).

In illustrating how the economic power is relegated to men and how mothers display and assess their daughters based on their physical viability in the marriage market, al-Zayyat delineates how women become objectified under patriarchal systems and mothering. The expectation that marriage and motherhood are a girl's sole purpose in life, along with upgrading themselves to become viable as brides place women as objects and men as subjects. One can argue that al-Zayyat is looking through de Beauvoir's lens which has critiqued the historical, anthropological, and psychoanalytical disciplines to understand the experiences of women to conclude that throughout history, women have been reduced to objects of men. From that prism where men have imagined women as "the other," women have been denied agency and regarded as the deviation from the norm. As de Beauvoir's theories assert: "the fundamental assumption that man is the norm and woman is the deviation has dominated the social, political and cultural life and consequently women have internalized this ideology so that they live in a constant state of inauthenticity" (Leitch et al. 1404). This resulted in impeding women's struggle to achieve existential freedom and, more importantly, autonomous subjectivity.

Layla's mother embodies that model of motherhood, expecting her daughter to follow in her footsteps and objectifying her to increase her marriageability to attain her sole purpose and goal in life, exemplified in marriage and motherhood. Layla despises the position that she is placed in: "A slave, nothing but a *jariya*! A *jariya* in the slave market! Dressing and adorning herself to raise her price. How could it be? Yet, it was the truth. This was the way life was; such were the conditions of a girl's life in the society in which she, herself, lived. She would have to accept this situation or die . . . Die?" (39/ 50).

By linking the objectification of women to slavery, one can argue that al-Zayyat is honing on the notion that women feel colonized within patriarchal structures:

Patriarchies [have] set a pattern of investment in political and economic power to compensate for their inability to give birth. Their identity became synonymous with power over others, beginning with women and their children. As a result, women became colonized people and like all colonized people they came to be described as weak, incapable of self-government, ignorant, irrational, and in need of firm control. (Phillips 146)

Through generations, mothers have handed down these traditions to their daughters which perpetuated their powerlessness and caused a great wedge in mother-daughter relationships. Rich asserts that daughters' rage at their mothers is likely to stem from the mothers having "relegated [them] to second-class status" (*Of Woman* 248). Layla experiences this anger and frustration toward her mother and her position within this oppressive system: "If only she could get out of this house! The anger welled up inside her body and lay motionless, its vastness caught in her throat, drying out her mouth and tongue. It was an anger that began undefined but soon came to concentrate on the figure of her mother" (33/ 47). This rage against her mother is rooted in knowing that she must follow the path that her mother had taken and knowing exactly where it will lead her: "A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman" (A. Rich, *Of Woman* 246-47).

The interplay between the private and public spheres, between the individual and the collective, is portrayed by al-Zayyat through a parallel between Layla's fight for liberation against the colonization of women in patriarchal structures and Egypt's ongoing fight for liberation from British colonization. Layla's budding patriotism gave her the needed vigor to instill hope that her future might be different from that of her mother. She also understood that "if she were to show the slightest rebelliousness or excitability, her mother would scold her by the hour" (31/ 40). However, the news of the cancellation of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian

Treaty inspires her to take part in the street demonstrations, fueled by the knowledge that women were as entitled as men in the national fight for liberation: “We’re every bit as ready as the boys are. Girls, girls—girls have just as many feelings about it all! We have to show what we feel!” (45/ 56). Layla quickly learns that even acts of patriotism and nationalism “[are] a masculine affair” (Moore 45) for she is severely punished and beaten by her father for participating in street riots:

[Her father] yanked off Layla’s shoes and against her feet sounded the slap of the hard slipper. As it hit against her legs and then her back, Layla could hear that slap mingling with the sound of a woman’s laugh on the stairs outside, the screaming of a newborn, and her mother’s choked sobbing. She heard her father’s voice, shouting at her mother—“shut up!”—and again, the crack of the slippers, one blow after another. (49/ 62)

Layla’s anger and feelings of oppression were highly exacerbated by her mother’s reaction. In contrast to her mother’s tenderness and feelings of pride when her brother was shot in the riots, instead, she accosts Layla with harsh words of disdain: “did anyone tell you to do the horrid thing you did? You’ve scandalized us; you’ve disgraced us all over the neighborhood. Now, isn’t [your cousin] Gamila a girl just like you? Why did you have to go and do what you did?” (52/ 65). Herman and Lewis argue that a daughter’s pride “is deeply wounded by the discovery that the mother places her husband and her sons above her daughter,” (150) and, one can argue, places the *usul* above all as her mother asserts: “The world demands as much, and anyone who doesn’t go along with it--well, they’re the ones who suffer for it” (33/ 43). The survival mechanism that is propagated by her mother, manifested in the constant demand to accept the given gender assignments and to assimilate to the societal constructs is, argues Rich, the antithesis of mothering: “The anxious pressure of one female on another to conform to a degrading and dispiriting role can hardly be termed

‘mothering,’” even if she does this believing it will help her daughter to survive” (A. Rich, *Of Woman* 246).

This kind of patriarchal mothering, according to Jane Flax, is not gender neutral as mothers tend to relate differently and differentiate between sons and daughters. The son, typically more esteemed socially and allotted more freedom, is placed in higher status in society. This causes mothers to have contradictory feelings towards their daughters: “I worry about you, Layla, and I feel sorry for you, too. You have no idea what the world is like” (33/ 43). Consequently, mothers tend to mold their daughters and become harsh with them as they anticipate the difficulties they will face in a man’s world: “the mother’s inner conflicts are likely to interfere with her ability to be emotionally available to her daughter, a situation which is problematic for the daughter’s psychological development” (Flax 173). Essentially, these double standards cause Layla to feel betrayed by her mother for not standing up for her as she is being beaten: “She’d never scream at Layla’s father. All her life, she would go on walking on tiptoe, her tears streaming down, voiceless, soundless” (51/ 63). Moreover, in contrast to the feelings of pride and liberation that she felt during the demonstrations, Layla becomes defeated by the repercussions of her participation and by the example her mother sets for her: “‘What can I possibly do?’ Fine. It was true. She was weak, she was feeble. just like her mother. And just like her mother, she would remain weak all her life. Her lips would just keep going paler and paler, and her tears would pour out endlessly, without a sound, without a voice” (52/ 64).

According to Hirsch, the unmet expectations from mothers “ultimately constitute a debilitating force locking the daughter into a pattern of repetition from which she cannot emerge, and which precludes further development and progression” (42). Essentially, the example set by her mother causes Layla deep feelings of defeat and socializes her consciousness into submission. Her adolescent dream for personal liberation, which is highly

linked with the path of national liberation, is frustrated by her mother's resistance to her independence. Moreover, it is also cemented by the knowledge that she has no other choice but to follow in her mother's footsteps:

Failing to recognize that wider social and economic pressures are at the root of her frustration, [the daughter] focuses her problems entirely on her mother and her rigid devotion to what [she] sees as her limited model of motherhood. [She] despises her mother for exemplifying the traditionally passive female role and expecting her to play the role of the marriageable daughter. (Phillips 3)

Al-Zayyat subtly exposes how even though women were partners in the revolutionary efforts, they only receive their recognition and rights to be actual participants "on paper," (54/ 67) as Layla asserts, which is not translated either on the national level or within the home. In doing so, al-Zayyat exposes the whole generation's hypocrisy, which as Radwa Ashour et al. explain, was a chaotic social reality that exasperated the tense dynamics between men and women: "There is an increasing contradiction between appearance and truth, word and deed, hope and illusion" (8). The liberation efforts and revolution that were happening on the streets did not reverberate in the homes and did not include women. Though Layla's defiance of the social injustices was growing, she still had to abide by the fundamentals, still had to be under the jurisdiction of her father, brother, and mother, and still had no right, as a woman, to be on the forefront of the fight for national liberation: "Wrong. Yes, indeed, I was wrong. I showed what I felt as if I were a real human being. I forgot. I forgot that I'm not a person, I'm only a girl. A woman. Yes, I forgot" (54/ 67).

If one examines this from the lens of Lila Abu-Lughod, she argues that the emancipation and modernization projects and discourses that marked the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been "simultaneously regulatory and emancipatory" (12). This

societal contradiction was highly felt by Layla since the ongoing liberation efforts that were happening on the streets did not parallel the power and gender dynamics that were at play in the vastitudes of the family structure. As Elleke Boehmer argues: “The script of national coming-into-being that orchestrates postcolonial independence interpellates young men and women differently. Young women, the daughters of the nation, traditionally remain the objects or recipients of national definitions” (108). Layla understood that those national definitions instigated her mother’s powerlessness and submission and –ultimately-- her diminishing status. Thus, she felt that her position as a woman, thus far, was a predicament and a hindrance to her dream of personal and national liberation.

On the national front, revolutionary efforts were gathering and pushing for organizing armed struggles in the Suez Canal. As her brother Mahmoud prepares to volunteer for the army, Layla feels a yearning desire to be part of the national movement: “‘I wish so much it were me,’ Layla was saying. ‘I wish I could go with you, Mahmud’” (91/ 114). She nostalgically recalls the day she joined the demonstrations in the streets and the feelings of melting within the collective with thousands of people surrounding her. Ellen McIarney argues that: “The intense emotion, feeling of aliveness, and sense of bodily communion becomes a transformative experience as [Layla] seeks to recreate this feeling in other human relationships [and she] finds this kind of inspiration through a romantic spark” (189). With this charged buildup as the backdrop, al-Zayyat commences the personal narrative of Layla’s journey toward emancipation which starts with her search for love. Being with a man and finding a “romantic spark,” one can argue, is also a reflection of her conflictual relationship with the lingering fundamentals, societal rules, and her charged relationship with her mother. Layla’s sense of betrayal from her mother due to her powerlessness and the passive role she plays in imprisoning herself and her daughter in the rules, fundamentals, and rubrics of the patriarchal society is the main source of grievance she experiences. The lack of an

empowering mother-daughter dynamic weakens Layla's ability to fight for any rights within the family, confirms her devaluation in the ongoing fight for liberation, and forces her to turn more exclusively to men: "Autonomy for women, it is implied, involves escape from the mother to the protective custody of a male" (Philips 63). Eric H. Erickson maintains that females hold their identity in "abeyance" until they find a man who rescues them from their inner "emptiness" and loneliness by filling the "inner space" (242). This assertion, that a woman seeks dependence on a man to form her identity "is patriarchally oriented and socially induced" (Phillips 62).

Layla's journey for personal liberation thus far has been a jagged effort to free herself from the imprisonment of the *usul* and fundamentals that govern society and motivate her patriarchal mother. Her emancipation efforts paralleled the efforts for national liberation in the streets, but neither Layla, nor Egypt, were free just yet. Thus, the interplay between the individual and the collective narratives plays an integral role in al-Zayyat's plot structure, and she uses Layla's move into womanhood as a continuation of this dynamic. Al-Zayyat uses a "doubly tripartite structure" (Moore 44) in portraying Layla's personal and political awakening. Layla's progression of love in three different relationships takes her through a "nascent passion, a hiatus of seclusion, sterile intellectualism and political inactivity to activist commitment and decolonization" (44). Al-Zayyat uses the three relationships metaphorically, symbolizing Layla's oscillation between enclosure and emancipation in the progression of her personal and collective consciousness. Layla's attraction to her cousin, brother's best friend, and neighbor Isam becomes metaphorically linked to her path to liberation through finding and experiencing love. The search for love allows Layla the personal freedom to be in control of her internal feelings. Perhaps the only thing that she has control over. For in an environment of extreme conservatism and oppression, the agency to

follow her heart was symbiotic to her breaking her inner walls in an attempt at breaking the outer ones.

Al-Zayyat uses the character of Isam as the conduit to evoke her commentary on the “class-infected attitudes towards women” (Moore 46) that were prevalent in the cultural milieu of the time. In its nascence, Layla’s adolescent infatuation with Isam evokes “her sense of self, especially the feminine self, which was badly bruised by her father’s beating” (Abudi 150) and her mother’s diminished persona. She feels desired and attractive and secretly hopes that, through Isam, she can escape her family’s “somber world” (150). Isam; however, exemplifies the patriarchal morality of the time, which objectifies women and places them as men’s property. Moreover, it defines a woman’s place through marriage and motherhood: “What use would a [college education] be? Every girl’s future is marriage” (80/ 98), as Isam asserts. This line of thought is propagated by Layla’s mother: “Her mother wanted her to marry as soon as possible, but with a dowry equivalent to what [her cousin and Isam’s sister] Gamila had gotten, and to a man no less well-off than Gamila’s” (122/ 152). Thus, women are seen as objects of a man’s desire whose only value is associated with a “market logic of supply and demand, where the worth of a commodity diminishes in proportion to its increasing availability” (McLarney 191).

Essentially, al-Zayyat hones on the notion that women’s identification and worth are validated through the male gaze which depicts women from a “masculine perspective and presents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer” (Eaton 873). Rachel Calogero, using the foundational psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Lacan, asserts that the male gaze affects women’s self-worth leading to self-objectification and “anticipation of being the subject of the male gaze” (17). Accordingly, the male gaze, seen through the patriarchal lens, increases women’s self-objectification by being implicitly taught by mothers how to behave in its presence:

This was life. Whenever a girl was born, they smiled in resignation. When she began to grow up, they imprisoned her, and trained her in the art yes, the art of life! They taught her to smile, to yield to others, to wear perfume, to exude sympathy. And to lie to wear a corset that would pull in her middle and lift her chest so her price would go up in the market and she could marry. (39/ 50)

Thus, the male gaze is an expression of the unequal and gendered social power “between the gazing man and the gazed-upon woman; and a conscious or subconscious social effort to develop gender inequality in service to a patriarchal sexual order” (Mulvey qtd. in Sassatelli 132).

To that end, “Isam concentrates on Layla’s body as an object to be possessed” (McLarney 191) and he constantly references Layla as his property: “You belong to me! You’re mine! My property! Understand?” (133/ 135) which he lusts for sexually and at the same time needs to protect, safeguard, and seal off through his neurotic jealousy. This results in a contradiction between his budding sexual desires, which he cannot practice with Layla, and his need to possess her as property through his often-violent jealous episodes. He longs to touch her and at the same time he feels disgusted in thinking about her in a sexual way since, according to the rules and the fundamentals, there are two types of women: “there was the sort in the street, the sort that sparked desire, and then there were the mothers, sisters, wives” (69-70/ 84). The former are the preys to be hunted and consumed and the latter to be respected and honored: “A man did not feel desire for his aunt’s daughter, not even for the sister of a friend, not if one was a proper, polite person” (70/ 85). To solve his sexual dilemma, Isam turns his gaze towards his mother’s maid, to relieve his sexual desires. Upon learning this, Layla is devastated, not only because she loses her belief in love but because she begins to understand the metrics and dynamics of the hypocritical society that she lives

in, one that is assuaged by his mother, as explained to her by her cousin Gamila: “She’s his girlfriend, *ya sitti!* Layla, you are *so naïve!* Any fellow his age, and not married --you know-- he has to do that. If he doesn't, he isn’t much of a man. Mama explained everything to me” (146/ 184). Layla eventually regains her sense of self and refuses his possessive and neurotic attitude towards her by declaring: “I’m not your property, I’m not anyone’s property! I am a free person! Understand?” (133/ 168). Thus, Layla’s story with Isam is short-lived as she is burnt by his betrayal and choked by his patriarchal views of women, manifested in his violent jealousy.

Al-Zayyat parallels Layla’s feelings of betrayal and being emotionally burnt by Isam to Cairo’s streets burning in 1952 in response to the British army killing 50 policemen: “Blood and fire! Blood surrounded her on every side, and the flames rose. The word ‘betrayal’ torched Layla’s ears. Fire--it enveloped the city, choked the city! Fire, choking her! She must see that fire; she must witness the flames gripping the city” (151/ 191). Essentially, Layla’s whole world collapses, and, in a moment of destitution, she tries to kill herself: “Everything inside of her was defeated, as if she had hefted a load that was really far too heavy for her capacity, and it had fractured her spine” (153/ 194). Hoping to relinquish her mother’s rules and her imprisonment, she believed that finding love was the answer: “she had challenged her father and posed a threat to her mother. She had flown in the face of their accustomed practices, had rejected their most fundamental beliefs. She had fallen in love” (153/ 194). Yet that love killed her spirit and left her with low self-esteem and self-loathing. Additionally, her brother, who had defied their parents by going to the Canal Zone, returns defeated: “crushed, cowering, withdrawn, his wings more than clipped” (154/ 194-195).

In that moment of individual and collective despair, she examines Isam and Gamila’s radiant lives: “Isam was confident and at peace. And Gamila--well, she went far beyond confident! Gamila was proud; she was splendid; she was smugly victorious. She had accepted

life as it was, and simply, without creating any complications” (155/ 196). Layla relates their successes with the fact that they never philosophized, never tried to rebel and they followed the script and the sanctioned practices that were narrated by their mother: “[Gamila and Isam] had followed those fundamentals. And therefore life had been good to [them]. Life had offered its bounty, its contentment, its security” (155/ 197). Though at some point she had regarded Gamila with disdain and superiority for following the rules, in this moment of utter despair, all she could do was recall her own mother’s mantra: “The one who knows the fundamentals does not suffer” (156/ 197).

Layla’s emotional crisis takes her on a different trajectory: “afraid of making herself vulnerable again, she carefully follows the fundamentals, arming herself with them as a protective shield” (Abudi 152). In fact, unlike her defiance in the past, she now relies on her mother and clinches to her views: “She had leaned on her mother, on the rules--the fundamentals--with which she had grown up, on the traditions of those around her” (184/ 230). Layla’s return to her mother’s fundamentals can be read through Bell Gale Chevigny who argues that: “It is inevitable that women will symbolically reflect their internalized relations with their mothers and in some measure recreate them” (80). Chevigny is looking through the lens of socio-psychology, which postulates that to identify and secure the sense of self, women go through “maternal mirroring” which can explain or justify Layla’s motivations and current state of self, inspired by “a need that might be especially strong in a woman who feels herself moving in uncharted waters and whose sense of herself is subject to sharp shifts in direction” (80). This shift in direction manifests itself in Layla’s decision to forget about love, bury herself in her studies at university, relinquish her national spirit, and, above all else, follow the rules.

In contrast to how she experiences the demonstrations in the past, the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 does little to move Layla’s fighting spirit: “Layla could not move; she

stood among [the masses], enjoying her sense of oneness with the crowd. How she wished she could stay among them, stay on and on! But the moment passed” (158/ 200). The interplay between the individual self and the collective is highlighted as al-Zayyat portrays Layla’s adhering to the rules and moving away from the collective for the first time in the narrative structure: “Layla, isolating herself, a captive to her individual concerns, alone and scraping the scabs from her wounds. The whole world had become concentrated into one small ‘me,’ and Layla’s only concern now was to protect herself from the aggression of the outside world” (184/ 230). Moreover, al-Zayyat ties the timing of the 1952 Revolution in the narrative sequence with Layla’s introduction to Husayn, her brother’s devoted nationalist and fellow comrade, who is the personification of the People in the text, which contrasts with the middle and upper-class milieu that al-Zayyat deconstructs within the narrative structure.

Given Layla’s move from the collective to the individual, Husayn, in his personification of nationalism, admonishes her to “come out of the narrow space of social rules in which she imprisoned herself before they strangle her. To connect her existence to that of her people and her country, so that her real self will renew itself and flourish. To fling the door wide open and leave it open” (Abudi 153). This seminal image of ‘the open door’ as the title of the novel is thus situated and explained as the “act of liberating the self by becoming a part of a larger entity in serving the nation and the country. At the same time, it is the act of breaking loose from the prison of the family, of traditional custom, and of personal fears and desires” (154). Yet Layla’s fears are not ready to be relinquished for her spirit is broken, her self-image is shattered, and her self-esteem superseded by self-loathing: “she was incapable of love. She was afraid of it; and there was only loathing in her heart, loathing for the world” (193/ 244). Thus, afraid of what love had caused her and how shattered she became, she resigns herself to the knowledge that she can no longer act on her impulsiveness, and instead, she will just follow the rules and fundamentals: “She might as well have had no

experience, learned nothing, never suffered before from her impulsiveness!” (194/ 246). To that end, Husayn’s romantic interest in Layla is quickly shot down by her as she is adamant about dismissing the possibility of repeating her ill-fated fantasies of love: “She was not going to sacrifice herself for anyone, lose herself in anyone, abase herself for anyone” (194/ 246).

Layla’s regression to the fundamentals propagated by her mother, her move away from the collective, and her stern outlook on life define the next phase in her progression. She becomes guarded and cold and takes a cue from her mother’s suppression and applies it to herself: “There she existed, fortifying herself against life, so fearful; and suppressing all the wellsprings of spontaneity and lively inquisitiveness that were in her nature” (211/ 266). She arms herself with this shield as she progresses in her university years, applying all the rules and fundamentals and thereby attracting the attention of a stern, narrow-minded, and conservative university professor. Al-Zayyat uses the persona of Dr. Fuad Ramzi to echo and parallel Layla’s state of mind. A rigid and authoritarian figure, he symbolizes the true meanings of patriarchy which “arose[s] in Layla both fear and attraction” (Abudi 154). Dr. Fuad embodies all the rules and fundamentals of society, and in his unyielding “commitment to what was right,” she finds the protection, self-control, and confidence she so eagerly yearned for. In adopting all his views, Layla modifies herself for she consigns herself in believing that her personal views yielded to nothing but heartache and despair: “This was not a phase of her life in which Layla felt any particular need to assert her will. She resigned herself to a great deal and tended to yield without argument. It almost seemed as if she did not dare to capitulate, for if she had, a danger she could ill define awaited her” (228-29/ 289). To that end, Layla “parrots” Dr. Ramzi’s ideals and becomes self-righteous, dry, emotionless, and judgmental of all those around her. Though she shivered under his gaze, she yearned for it since Dr. Fouad was what was needed for her to validate herself and her choice to deny

Husayn's love and deny her dream of emancipation. In her mind, she used the rules and fundamentals to justify her choice: "Black was black and white was white, and there were no intermediate shades. He knew the boundaries, and so did she; moreover, so did her mother, [her friends], everyone" (242/ 308).

For a brief moment, Layla regains her real self as she volunteers for the National Guard and is reminded of how women could play a role in defending the nation: "sentiments about the value of women, the true equality being given to them for the first time, since they were now being given the right to defend the nation" (245/ 312). Through them, she was reminded of the self she used to be: "scenes from her life passed before her: herself as a little girl, jumping in rhythm and raising and lowering her right hand, and chanting as the demonstrators were doing, 'Weapons, weapons, we want weapons.' Her image as a young teenager, on the shoulders of other demonstrators, women this time, calling out in a voice that was not her but the voice of the thousands" (245/ 312). However, those feelings were short-lived as she fell victim to her mother's approval of her current path as well as being taken by her mother's excitement of her impending nuptials with the "respectful" professor: "[Her mother] was so happy; finally, finally, she had found a bridegroom for her daughter and one whom she could flaunt in front of her sister. And what a marriage! A marriage to end all marriages! Such a respectable match, that fetched her the finest clothes and put her in the company of all the best people!" (251-52/ 322). The problems of patriarchal mothering are underlined in de Beauvoir's relationship with her mother. Like Layla's mother, being a model of the submissive wife and devoted mother, de Beauvoir's mother's entire self-worth was centered around "men's proclamation that [marriage] is a women's supreme accomplishment" and without it, a "woman's life is empty" (Phillips 153). Thus, perfecting this role became her sole ambition and she expected her daughter to follow in those footsteps, as "the dutiful daughter" (154). De Beauvoir, who became resentful of this limited ideal,

criticized this model for daughters and the “cultural indoctrination that women are inferior” and argued for women’s self-respect and independence by relinquishing the role of the “dutiful daughter” (154).

Al-Zayyat employs Layla’s role as a “dutiful daughter” who regresses to the fundamentals propagated by her mother, moves away from the collective, and adopts a stern outlook on life as a conduit for deconstructing the fabric of society and exposing the hypocrisies of the cultural milieu. Layla soon discovers that the proper and respectful professor is not what he seems and that his gaze, which she yearned for and never received, was directed towards her cousin Gamila’s décolletage: “with her, he acted the god; with Gamila, he was a child, saliva dribbling from his mouth” (283/ 364). Moreover, Dr. Ramzi’s contradiction is illustrated as Layla overhears his disparaging comments and vulgar remarks when advising her brother: “there’s no substance to what we call ‘love.’ There’s desire, which is gone the minute you get what you want” (284/ 365). Ultimately, she begins to fathom that his only interest in her was to control her: “you are compliant and quiet, and you listen to me, you do what I say” (268/ 345). At that moment, Layla realizes that Dr. Ramzi is another link in the chain of imprisonment that has ruled her life thus far. As she watches --in a half-cup of tea-- a “drowning fly floating trying desperately but hopelessly to free itself” (268/ 345), she has her epiphany: “Suddenly the whole situation was clear before her, a panorama in all its details: the curtain was yanked open, removed abruptly from before her eyes and her mind” (273/ 352).

Layla’s epiphany, which coincided with the nationalization of the Suez Canal, leads her to Port Said to be part of the people in opposition to the foreign aggressor’s attack on Egypt. Her decision to close the door behind everything she knew and open the door to expel the tyranny of her circumstances echoes the nation’s fight against the aggressor. Moreover, it cements the notion that instead of yearning for a man’s gaze, she needed to gaze inwards and

find her own voice, her own self, apart from any man. In Port Said, Layla is finally reunited with herself and is forever transformed. As she takes care of the wounded during the Tripartite Aggression, she melts with the plight of the people and insists on staying on the battlefield to assist the fighters: “I am not leaving” she asserts to her brother, who wonders in amazement and astonishment why her voice suddenly sounds different: “This tone of absolute decision he had never heard from [her]. She had left the circle of the family, the sphere of the self, for the orbit of all, and no one could keep her back” (338/ 342).

As Layla lies in the hospital to mend her wounds after a fierce battle, she feels a surge of confidence and pride that washes over her as she reminisces on her trials and tribulations. She is also reminded of Husayn’s words to her: “Layla, do you know what you’ll find on shore? You’ll find something more important than me, more important than anyone else, too. You’ll find what it is you’ve lost, you’ll find yourself, you’ll find the true Layla” (189/ 238). Layla, finally feeling liberated, walks out of the open door toward her journey of finding her autonomous voice which culminates with the expulsion of the aggressors from Port Said. There, she is united with Husayn and, together with the triumphant crowds, they watch the people topple down the statue of De Lesseps, a symbol of colonialism and slavery. As a symbol of her true liberation, she sardonically shouts: “Rules! We must follow the fundamentals” (358/ 459) as she urges the crowds to topple the statue, and with it the rules.

While the film version of *The Open Door* presents Layla’s search for autonomous selfhood and voice as dependent on Husayn, al-Zayyat is adamant to note that this was not how she intended to delineate Layla’s arrival at her liberation. According to al-Zayyat, Layla’s liberation is achieved “by herself, and through her own action she develops herself” (al-Zayyat, “On Political” 255). Layla’s journey of developing her selfhood begins with love, love for the men in her life, and love for her country. In this process of personal liberation and self-determination, the lines between the love of country and the love of another become

blurred whilst forgetting her love of self. In the end, it is the search for her own voice that sharpens the lines of her quest for national liberation and political freedom and ultimately leads her to open the door for her autonomy in life and love. Thus, while the merging between the private and the public spheres plays an integral role in the formation of Layla's selfhood, her story is essentially a story about the integration of multiple and split selves into a harmonious whole.

Layla is faced with a plethora of impediments in her journey of self-realization. A patriarchal family structure that is motivated and fueled by the *usul*, rules, and debilitating fundamentals; a dogmatic society whose morality is drenched in hypocrisy; and men who view women as property to own and control; all of which are mediated through her relationship with a submissive mother who propagates the rubrics of patriarchy. Within this milieu, it becomes easy for Layla's "boundaries of selfhood [to] become dangerously blurred" (Hirsch 138-139). In attempting to deconstruct the blurred lines to arrive at the authentic selfhood of her protagonist, al-Zayyat contrasts "tropes of enclosure and liberation" (Moore 45), to not only address women's "traditional muteness and/or marginality in the national script," but, in so doing "rewrite their role within it" (Boehmer 108). In that way, Layla's story becomes a trope for the nascence of feminist consciousness and liberation which coincides with the nation's liberation. Al-Zayyat is adamant to correlate Layla's search for autonomy against imprisonment with that of the nation. Moreover, she is intent on placing the nation's struggle for liberation as the catalyst and inspiration for Layla's quest for autonomy. In so doing, al-Zayyat illustrates that "the history of nationalism in Egypt has involuntarily triggered the history of women's liberation" (Abouelnaga 11). At that time, women had to endure the double burden of being subordinated by the colonizer and by the patriarch. In rebelling against those forces, the boundaries of selfhood become blurred at times, but the aim is to break the inner walls, to break the outer walls, and carve out an

autonomous voice. A voice, according to al-Zayyat's personal ideology, that is liberated "from the prisonhouse of the self" and one that is "an active responsible human being, open to [their] country and [their] people and preoccupied with their concerns" (al-Zayyat "On Political" 247). Within the creases of the liberated self, the boundaries of selfhood have the leeway to be fluid and the private can melt into the public and the individual into the collective, since they are as such through her own agency.

VIII. Samar Attar

A. Identifying the Self: The Exiled Self

In analyzing Attar's fictional coming-of-age-novel *Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl*, which captures the trials and tribulations of her protagonist Lina, the research will analyze the evolution of her individualistic self and her decision for voluntary exile against the backdrop of the changing familial, societal, and political conditions in Syria in the 1950s. Lina's decision to leave will be analyzed through the lens of the plethora of contradictions that found their nascence in her relationship with her mother and extended to everything that she experienced in her family, society, and country at large.

Banned in Syria for its depiction of a woman who rejects her country and all the systems and institutions within it, Attar's progressive narrative cannot be analyzed without contextualizing it with the author's personal account. What sets Attar apart from other authors is the extensive first-person analysis of her work which provides insight into her psyche and motivations and which dissects her journey by drawing a parallel between herself and her protagonist. Like Lina, Attar left Damascus, enacted voluntary exile, and, in 1965, set out on a journey of independence to create "a space of freedom" and escape a "city drenched in violence" which exemplified "prison and wretchedness" to her state of being (Attar, "To Create" 216). This act of extreme rebellion against her family, religion, and country landed her in Canada to pursue her higher education to eventually become a professor of English Literature at Dalhousie University (Abudi 159).

It was during her seminar on James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) that Attar became attuned to the similarities between herself and Joyce, thus inspiring her novel's title: "Joyce rebelled against his narrow Catholic environment, his home, his religion, and his country. He left Ireland to return but once" (Attar, "The Price" 151-52).

Like Joyce, who was constantly influenced by his native city and wrote about nothing else after his departure, Attar was also continuously haunted by her past: “It is true that I ran away from Damascus, but later I wrote about nothing else” (Attar, “To Create” 215). Essentially, the act of writing about the dismal experiences of growing up in Damascus allowed her to reconcile this oppressive chapter of her personal journey: “The semi-autobiographical act was a therapeutic task through which I could deal emotionally with my exiled self” (216). Attar’s therapeutic act of writing places *Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl* as part of a trilogy, the first volume of which is *The House on Arnus Square* (1988), which chronicles Lina’s return to her native city after twenty years of exile, and a third book that is yet to be written. Attar insists that *The House* is the first part of the trilogy since “it is a flashback to the history of the house [she grew up in] and its surroundings” (Abudi 160), though its events take place twenty years after Lina leaves Damascus and its writing and publication followed *Lina*.

While her narratives are considered a work of fiction, by Attar’s account, they have captured her life in Damascus during a very turbulent time in Syria’s oppressive and violent social and political history during the 1950s and 1960s: “[Lina] very well embodies my deepest longing for freedom and my never-ending struggle to throw off the restrictions imposed on my mind by family, religion, and nation” (Attar, “The Price” 159). In describing her work, Attar is adamant to connect the act of writing with arriving at her selfhood, namely “a new definition of selfhood” (Attar, “To Create” 221). This selfhood is marked by its singularity and individualistic approach and one that is rejecting and rebelling against its surroundings: “Lina and I possess a conscious awareness of the singularity of our individual life. Throughout most of our history, we have opposed ourselves to all others; we have lived with others, yet we have felt ourselves to exist outside of others” (219). Essentially, Attar’s journey of the self has been one in search of freedom and the annihilation of the restrictions

imposed on her by familial, societal, religious, political, and national institutions. Thus, Attar was in a constant struggle with the external world and yearned for the liberation of the self and “the transformation of a backward and unjust society into an achievable utopia” (219). However, the social and political landscape and rigid conventions of the time made it quite difficult for Attar to attain this utopia which caused her to seek exile in search of freedom.

In reflecting upon the self as essence and as a socially-constructed creation, Attar is keen to reiterate that the writer cannot be totally objective or neutral. That is why she refrains from allocating her works to the autobiographical genre and instead presents them as “works of art” (Attar, “To Create” 227). Through them, Attar can question the self as “an autonomous being” (223) in relation to others by reflecting on her journey and offering an insight into the female experience that is allocated between the creases of fiction and reality: “When I wrote *Lina*, a novel of formation, I reflected on my past, my feminist awakening, and transformed only what concerned me into literature” (226n27). Attar’s journey of the self and reflection on the past is shaped by a society that she rejects, with Damascus --and its shadow-- constantly looming over her. Her literature and narrative portray a strong point of view and singular opinion about the refusal of her circumstance. Essentially, *Lina* is a depiction and a critique of “an Arab society in flux, yet at the same time stifled by its outward traditions and rent by internal discord” (Romaine 204). Attar depicts Lina’s coming-of-age, told through the lens of her rejection of family, social convention, and religion under the watchful eye of a strict and tyrannical military system of government in troubled Syria. To that end, the novel was banned in Syria since Attar rejected the instruction to make severe cuts to the manuscript to receive approval for publication. In her analysis of why she adamantly rejected the censorship, Attar cites André Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*:

My novel hasn't got a subject ... Let's say. If you prefer it, it hasn't got one subject ... Please understand; I should like to put everything into my novel.

I don't want any cut of the scissors to limit its substance at one point rather than at another. For more than a year now that I have been working at it, nothing happens to me that I don't put into it everything I see, everything I know, everything that other people's lives and my own teach me. (qtd. in Attar, "The Price" 156)

Essentially, Attar not only wanted to record everything that Lina experienced internally and externally; but more importantly, she didn't want to accept any external control over a narrative that rejected those exact methods of control.

After a period of desperation, the manuscript was eventually accepted by a publishing house in Lebanon, but due to the Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982, Attar was unable to maintain contact with the publisher and only found out about the novel's release into the market through a friend who found it in a bookstore in London. She corresponded with the bookstore and, essentially, had to buy a copy of her own novel (Attar, "To Create" 217). The ban in Syria, in addition to the charged political climate of the time, made it impossible for readers and scholars to read or review the novel. Thus, the story of the novel's publication and review echoes what Attar tried so desperately to escape. This motivated Attar to translate the novel herself to maintain control over her narrative, reach a wider audience of readers, and contest any acts of censorship. In so doing, she comes to see the act of self-translation as a "response to continuous attempts to stifle and silence my voice as a novelist. The act of self-translation has made me visible and had given me a voice which I was denied as a writer in Arabic" (Attar, "Translating" 134). In analyzing the connection between exile and translation, Azada Seyhan argues that: "what silences voices even before any experience of displacement and exile is censorship in the home country of the exiled" (80). Thus, writers who are propelled into exile because of oppressive and censoring regimes, whether voluntary or not, can regain their voice through translation. Attar found the task quite daunting

considering the harsh criticism of the culture of oppression in the novel: “I was apprehensive to tackle the task of translation at a time when the political climate in the Middle East was ugly and dangerous” (Attar, “The Price” 154). Notwithstanding, she was adamant about achieving her goal because she wanted to make her voice heard: “censorship was and still is the reason that forced me to use translation as a strategy to assert my voice as a writer” (Attar, “Translating”141). Being in exile at the time of writing, and thirteen years later at the time of translation, gave Attar a new perspective on the interplay between the self and others: “[Exile] helped me to see myself, my country, and the world with new eyes. Had I stayed in Damascus, or returned to it, all my judgments would have been derived from the group. I would not have enjoyed full freedom, or become quite independent” (Attar, “The Price” 151).

B. Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl

The interplay between the self and the other, the individual and the group dominates Attar’s narrative and journey of the self. By reiterating her conscious awareness of the “singularity of [her individual] life,” her opposition to others, and her existence outside of others, Attar frames the interaction between the self and the other as the lens through which she narrates Lina’s journey: “Her evolving sense of self --her process of becoming-- is shaped through daily interaction with her social environment” (Abudi 169). Attar allows Lina the space to transcend the events by placing her as a passive observer (she doesn’t say anything until the middle of the novel) that soaks up everything around her to form her consciousness until she is ready to express her own thoughts and ideas. In that way, Lina becomes the observer of the *portrait* of the *Damascene* life and the subject as the girl who awakens to the world surrounding her. This portrait “vividly describes scenes from Damascene’s life and traditions in the 1950s [and] the suffocating atmosphere of an

autocratic regime and a repressive society” (Boullata 864) as observed, traced, and internalized by the third-person omniscient narrator.

Reflected in the scenes are the shifting realities of the troubled social and political climate of Syria in the 1950s under the successive rule of military regimes set against the establishment of the state of Israel, the rise of liberation from colonialism, and the general turmoil affecting countries bordering Palestine. On a personal level, the novel narrates Lina’s self-formation in typical *Bildungsroman* fashion registering everything around her through her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Her coming-of-age is juxtaposed with the “breakdown and increasing chaos and confusion in her external environment, as her family, religion, and nation lose their authority over her emotions and mind” (Attar, “To Create” 217). Within these conditions, Lina experiences the “agony and ambiguities [of a] society caught between the old and new” (P. Rich, *Muslim Women* 39) as reflected in the microcosm of her family.

The opening scene serves as a reflection of this microcosm as it begins with a lavish family dinner in honor of Lina’s father after he is laid to rest. Through it, the reader is introduced to her upper-class bourgeois family and the main players in her life. Attar sets the stage well and foreshadows the socio-cultural milieu and repressive and constraining society that will surround the 12-year-old Lina throughout the narrative: “The funeral dinner depicts the stifling and oppressive environment not only within the family but also the country at large” (Attar, “To Create” 218). Lina passively observes all the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the family as Attar weaves discussions of politics, religion, feudalism, and gender to portray the societal status, attitudes, and opposing views of the cultural milieu⁵. Within this

⁵ The opening scene echoes the Christmas dinner scene in Joyce’s *A Portrait* where, upon his return from Clongowes Wood College, the young Stephen Dedalus is an almost silent observer to the clash of ideologies and characters of his family as they altercate about Irish nationalism and religion which sullies the family gathering (Joyce 29-45).

background, her family represents “the fundamental unit in society, where each individual possesses his own moral path” (Al-Basha 57)⁶. Lina’s brother and two brothers-in-law spark conversations on politics with her two married sisters taking a back seat. Her mother and unmarried older sister Bahiya take on the role of passive observers and the plot thickens as her unmarried, rebellious, and defiant sister Rima announces that she is not just a socialist but a communist. Attar uses this announcement, which evokes shock, anger, and disdain, to delineate the dynamics of the family. Lina observes Rima being hit by their only brother for expressing her political views while her mother sits idle, lost in her grief: “Suddenly she saw her brother’s hand rise in the air and slap Rima’s delicate cheeks. Her sister fled the room and slammed the door behind her. Lina’s mother bowed her head and broke into sobs” (7/ 16)⁷.

In addition to the charged family dynamics that Attar portrays in her opening scene, she also lays the ground for Lina’s complicated relationship with her mother. In this scene, Lina observes that her mother, whose traditional upbringing and activities center around the home and the kitchen, “has little to say in the affairs of the family” (Abudi 161). Her mere contribution to the gathering was to plead with her children to end the charged conversation: “For pity’s sake, let us not have any political discussion on this day, she said in agony” (5/ 11). Not only was the mother unable to unite the family and end the grievances that occur at dinner, but her only reaction to the violence that occurs on Rima is to sigh and sob. Judith Arcana alludes to the budding breach between mother and daughter which occurs through the daughter’s observation of a mother who, in her duplicity with the male order and her incapacity of action, deeply cements “expectations which are fostered by the oppressive culture in which mothers socialize their daughters as they must (passive and submissive), not

⁶ Original text of article in Arabic. English translation by me.

فإننا نعثر على الخلية الأولى في المجتمع وهي أسرة لينا ولكل فرد سبيله الخلقي

⁷ Throughout the thesis, when citing the primary sources, the first page number indicated will be of the English translation followed by the page number of the Arabic original. In this case English translation and original Arabic by Samar Attar.

as they might” (5). Moreover, this incapacity to react to the violence against her daughter presents a shock to Lina as she begins to understand what it means to be a woman in a world where power is in the province of men. In addition to what this means to her own status, this incident makes Lina reevaluate her judgment of her mother in trying to fathom “how could [she] have allowed this [to] happen? Why didn’t [she] fight harder?” (Herman and Lewis 149).

Notwithstanding, the fatherless Lina constantly seeks affection, protection, and nurturance from her mother who, in her sorrows, is neither involved in Lina’s affairs nor emotionally available to attend to her needs: “a mournful, taciturn, and passive figure, the mother does not develop a close relationship with Lina or with any of her daughters after the father’s death” (Abudi 162). This affects Lina deeply as, being the youngest of her four sisters and brother, she is the one most in need of her mother’s nurturance and love, especially after the loss of her father. Lina’s constant need for her mother can be analyzed through Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto who focus on the authentic need for a mother as “a need vaster than any single human being could satisfy, except by loving continuously [and] unconditionally. [A] need that is evoked by the sense of uniqueness of the mother, by her singularity” (204). Lina’s lack of nurturance highly affects her which Attar hones on when unbeknownst to Lina, her mother decides to send her away to her cousin in the countryside to assuage her grief for losing her father: “she didn’t know why her mother had decided to send her away from home” (10/ 21). After Lina’s return, eager to see her mother again, she finds her surrounded by women and engrossed with the news of the army’s occupation of the third floor of her family’s apartment building. Attar uses this incident to portray the formation of Lina’s budding consciousness.

Not only is Lina affected by her mother’s negligence, but also by the political climate of the time, which Attar weaves together seamlessly, as she asserts: “The public sphere

always influences the private one” (Attar, “The Price” 157). Thus, by injecting the familial setting with political undertones, Attar emphasizes “the beginning of the disintegration of the legal system in the country and [showcases how] Syrian citizens became unable to confront the army or sue its members” (157). This inability to confront is echoed in Lina’s interaction with her mother. Expecting her mother to shower her with love, she is completely ignored by her oblivious mother who is unaware of her daughter’s presence. This confuses Lina and causes feelings of uncertainty: “No one looked at her. Her mother was sitting on the sofa, her head down. The women’s heads nodded in agreement, but Lina’s mother remained like a silent statue, the black veil coming down on her shoulders. Lina hesitated should she run to her mother? Should she hug her and tell her she missed her so much? She stepped forward, wishing someone would look at her” (45/ 80). Shelley Phillips points to the lack of attention from mothers as an indication of how daughters value themselves: “daughters described factors that made them feel as though they were not mothered enough. They revolved around their perceptions of whether or not their mothers had valued them as persons and had been sensitive to their need for self-esteem” (114). From this standpoint, Attar portrays Lina’s relationship with her mother as a complicated one. On one hand, Lina lacks overt care and nurturance from her mother but on the other hand, her mother supports Lina’s budding poetic talent and her pursuit of education.

Attar depicts Lina as a sensitive girl with a vibrant imagination and poetic talent. This sensitivity complements her nature and allows her to observe everything around her, thus forming her selfhood. Lina not only observes the internal dynamics of the family, but she becomes aware of the socio-political ones as well. At school, she observes her classmates and, through her internal monologue that is inspired by Rima’s communist ideology, wonders what becomes of the workers and the peasants who aren’t privileged enough to receive a similar education. In that way, Attar hones on the notion that Lina is highly aware of her

surroundings and is silently observing and internally recording it all. Her nascent selfhood and self-definition are etched through her poetic persona. In an intertextual allusion to Joyce (and arguably Tuqan), Attar presents Lina's poetic self in the same manner that the two authors have done in their narratives⁸:

She opened the first page of her notebook and wrote:

NAME: Lina Haseebi

GRADE: Seven

OCCUPATION: Poet. (16/ 30)

Lina discovers that it was her mother who placed the exercise notebook and a sharpened pencil next to her nightstand, though she wonders why her mother doesn't do it overtly.

Phillips explains a mother's way of communicating by asserting: "Often the mother is extremely proud of her adolescent daughter, but she doesn't express it in the extravagant way her daughter wants. This is not to say the mother is in the wrong. On the contrary, the mother is the catalyst for her daughter's growth. Her responses disappoint her daughter, but they push her toward maturity" (51). By leaving the notebook and pencil for Lina, her mother is giving her a cue about her self-concept and formation:

Much of the process of becoming a person involves taking on board verbal and unspoken messages about ourselves and interpreting and acting upon them. The responses of parents to [children's] behaviors play an important role in building a child's self-concept. If told often enough that they have certain characteristics or tendencies, children tend to develop them and incorporate them into their self-view."
(Phillips 38-39)

⁸ In *A Portrait*, Joyce frames Stephen as an artist in his narrative by inscribing his name and presenting his poetic identity in the same visual structure (Joyce 14). In *A Mountainous Journey*, Tuqan presents her poetic persona in the same manner in her narrative, marking her birth as a poet (58/ 70).

Lina's mother also acts as a catalyst in her education. Being exceptionally literate among women of her generation, she recognizes the value of education and pushes Lina and her sister Rima to pursue theirs. Lina's mother's value for education is rooted in the fact that she was deprived of it after the fifth grade to get married and have children. This greatly impacted her as apparent when she reminisces about her childhood: "my father used to be proud of me and always said: 'My scholar child.' Indeed, I was a scholar in a society of ignorant women. I read and wrote, and that was the greatest thing a woman could aspire to" (101/ 177). Lina observes her mother's glow "as if she were in a trance" (102/ 178) as she recalls a world where her father taught her about literature, history, and sciences. She also observes her mother's somber face as she laments: "we were always told that our world was different from that of men, that we were born to get married and beget children. I could not object" (102/ 178). Herman and Lewis assert that "almost all mothers have some fantasies of what they might become if they had the possibility of other choices" (158). Moreover, mothers fear that their daughters might end up with the same fate because of their first-hand knowledge of the limited range of choices available to them. As de Beauvoir asserts: "In her daughter, the mother does not hail a member of the superior caste; in her she seeks a double. She projects upon her daughter all the ambiguity of her relation with herself" (488). One can argue that what Attar tries to delineate is that mothers themselves are victims of their circumstances and fight for their daughters in their way: "Many women criticize their mothers without recognition of the subordinate role and limited choices their mothers had" (Bernardez 177). Thus, in her bid to alleviate the repetition of her fate on Lina, her mother adamantly refuses a highly reputable suitor for her when she is accosted by his mother: "But Lina is young, plus she wants to finish her education" she replies (56/ 99).

Though Lina's mother's progressive attitude in propagating for education and fighting against Lina's early marriage in a society where "education and work are assigned as

males' duties [and where] women are supposed to do their domestic duties" (Alhawamdeh 161), the narrative reveals that her actual reality is still rooted in the patriarchal structure she inhabits. As Arcana asserts: "We learn from, and repeat in our own lives, our mothers' daily reality, whatever their dreams might have been" (13). Thus, Lina wonders why when her mother recites her tales from *One Thousand and One Nights*, the heroes are all male and they all belong to the ruling class. What saddens her the most is her mother's reaction when she inquires why there isn't a woman Sinbad: "her mother laughed at her mixed-up ideas and assured her that man was different than woman and that he alone was capable of confronting difficulties" (35/ 63-64). Thus, Lina's efforts at asserting her female selfhood are thwarted by her mother "who taught her the patriarchal view of male superiority over women" (Abudi 163). Though Lina's mother seeks to promote education and advancement through literature, her choice of heroes depicts and reinforces "the incorporation of marginal self-perceptions in females [where] [m]en are over-represented and depicted as participating in a much broader range. They socialize girls into the passivity and subordination expected of them under patriarchy" (Phillips 43).

The mother's traditional way of life and upbringing is also reflected in her treatment of her son Khalid. Being the only son after the father's death, he is treated as the head of the household. This bestows upon him the ultimate authority over the family where his word reigns supreme and his actions, like slapping his sister Rima, are never questioned by the mother. To that end, when he is drafted into the military service, the mother dotes over his letters and treats them with the utmost importance and reads them out loud to her visitors. Lina observes this behavior and is highly critical of her mother for acting "as if she were a pupil in the second grade, trying to memorize verses from the Quran" (66/ 116). In her book *Khawatir min asfal al-'alam* (Reflections from the World Down Under) (1999), Attar reflects on how Arab women see themselves through the societal norms as she writes: "When an

Arab girl is born, whether in Beirut or Cairo, Damascus or Baghdad, Khartoum or Rabat, into a rich or poor family, educated or not, Muslim or non-Muslim, she is often received with wailing, and her mother is consoled or censured for giving birth to daughters” (57). Herman and Lewis attribute a daughter’s criticism and resentment of a mother’s male preference “as a rejection [and] a betrayal. Not only does [the daughter’s] esteem for her mother suffer, but her own self-esteem is endangered by the thought that she might share in her mother’s inferior status” (150).

Lina’s esteem for her mother is not only affected by her preferential treatment of her brother but also by the fact that she does not satisfy her inquisitive mind. When Lina overhears a conversation about sex during her visit to the countryside, she recalls how her mother had concealed the truth from her: “her mother had told her about the stork leaving its eggs in beds, and how the eggs break, there emerging from them the soft heads of children with tearful eyes and withered cheeks” (40/ 72). This affects Lina deeply as she feels that her mother is not a reliable or credible source of information and that “all these stories [she taught her] crumbled” (40/ 72). Essentially, she begins to understand that “the adult world was dark, vague, and she didn’t understand anything about its rules or secrets” (40/ 72).

Though Lina’s mother had some redeeming qualities, she “fails to provide Lina with a role model, she does not serve as a source of identification or inspiration for her, and she does not become a guiding force in her life” (Abudi 164). Lina observes in wonderment her mother’s passiveness and submission: “although Lina felt that her mother suffered from a strange feeling of persecution, she never heard her complain” (108/ 187). To that end, Lina’s budding awareness informs her feelings of matrophobia and her distance from her mother begins to take form: “Lina didn’t wish to think that she would sit one day on the sofa like her mother, blaming God” (128/ 223).

Female theorists examine Freudian and Neo-Freudian theories, namely object-relations psychology, which considers female development as the gradual process of “identification with and differentiation from a mother who remained an important inner object for the maturing daughter” (Hirsch 20). This process, as Flax argues, is shaped by the oscillations between symbiosis and separation (175). Thus, the mother’s domination of Lina’s childhood and the subsequent disappointment Lina feels in her mother influence her process of disidentification and separation from her. Essentially, in not finding a role model in her mother, Lina begins to realize that she needs to distance herself from the maternal influence and her “inherited self” to avoid “the reproduction of (parts of) the mother in (parts of) the self” (Lawler 62). For without the conscious intervening of the self to actively *produce* the process of individuation, “the characteristics of the mother [are] simply reproduced in [the] self” (62). As Lawler suggests: “the link between parent and child lies in the child’s past, what that link means in the future is contingent on how the individual person acts” (60). Lina’s process of individuation, rooted in not finding a role model in her mother, is informed by her observation of the world around her and her realization that there is a “low tolerance for individuality” (Abudi 165) in the world she and her mother inhabit.

This realization echoes Attar’s personal narrative which she depicts through Lina’s experience. By deconstructing the familial and sociopolitical influences around Lina, Attar foreshadows — and gives credence to—Lina’s (and her) decision for exile. At home, in addition to her complicated relationship with her mother, Lina is constantly accosted by her older, dull, and very conventional sister Bahiya who often criticizes her and Rima for pursuing their education, adopting progressive ideas, and not abiding by the standard way of doing things. Moreover, Bahiya propagates the dominant patriarchal ideology which Lina could never relate to: “Bahiya sided with Khalid because he was a man and because she believed sincerely that men understood the world, and that their ability to distinguish

between good and evil could not be compared with the ability of women” (46/ 83). At school, her inquisitive mind and creative spirit are crushed as she is faced with an education system that devalues the individual and promotes conformity and obedience. When one of her classmates asks the teacher: “Why do we have to memorize facts without attempting to analyze or criticize them?” (80/ 141), Lina gets inspired and musters the courage to express her opinion as well: “When we studied *Shajarat al-Durr* and the Caliph in Baghdad sent a letter to the princess in which he wrote: ‘If you don’t have a man to rule you, let us know so we can send you one’ we never discussed the content of the letter, nor did we comment on it” (80/ 142). The indifferent teacher ignores their comments, tells them they are too young for such questions, hits the desk dismissively, and shouts: “We are not here to study politics. My duty as a teacher is to tell you what happened in the past” (81/ 143).

Left without answers to her inquiries, Lina postulates that the teacher’s reaction is rooted in fear and finds consolation in her ability to seek knowledge on her own from history books or get guidance from her sister Rima. Notwithstanding, she is still unsatisfied with her current level of knowledge: “Events floated in her mind like corpses. It annoyed her that she couldn’t relate the causes to the effects or see history as an unfragmented entity in its past or present” (82/ 144). One can argue that Attar is honing on her personal experience with the educational system in Syria and how hard it was for children to grow up and seek knowledge: “Childhood does not exist as a stage of development in Syria. [Syrian children] are indoctrinated in the state ideology from an early age, either by the various political factions or by the ruling party, and they are burdened with fears of real or imagined enemies of the Syrian state and people” (Attar, “To Create” 218). Within this system of power, which trickles down to all institutions including schools, those like Lina who question or inquire are accused of being a “heretic” (172/ 298) and teachers socialize children into blind and dogmatic obedience: “if you obey your parents, then you’ll go to heaven” (12/ 23).

As a highly perceptive and inquisitive adolescent, Lina continues to be influenced by her interactions with her social environment. More importantly, her nascent opinion of what she experiences comes to fruition to shape her consciousness and sense of self. To that end, Lina registers everything that happens in her immediate surroundings and the country at large. Walking through her city, she witnesses the poverty, oppression, and exploitation of the people. Moreover, Lina and her family's subjugation to the army's forceful takeover of the third floor of their building in addition to the tragic death of the son of an orange vendor by a speeding military tank near her house cause her deep feelings of resentment: "[Lina] is deeply disturbed by the lack of civil liberties, the political divisiveness, and the brutality of the authorities" (Abudi 169). Her escape from her repressive reality is experienced through her constant imaginary visions of a utopian city where nature rules, where laborers and peasants have their rights, and where she is free from the stronghold that she faces from her mother, family, and society at large: "In Lina's mind, imagination overlaps with history, adding mundane daily details to historical events, like when she walks in the rose gardens she imagines herself in the heydays of the gardens of Granada"⁹ (Awadalla 11). Yet even the most utopian dreams could not assuage Lina or allow her to escape her reality:

She hated violence in all its forms. But the mental violence surpassed everything in her view. She could not get used to living with it or accepting it. She was confronting it daily in her home, in her school, and society at large. All she wanted was to grow alone, independent from anything that could exert pressure on her mind or deform it. But the figures who always ran behind her, always trying to tame her by any

⁹ Original text of the article in Arabic. English translation by me:

"ففي مخيلة لينا يتداخل الخيال بالتاريخ، فتضيفي على الأحداث التاريخية تفاصيل يومية—مثلاً: عندما تمشي في حدائق الورود تتخيل نفسها في حدائق غرناطة في عصور إزدهارها."

means, were disguised in different clothing and behind different masks.

(153/ 266)

Lina's journey of selfhood conflicts with her environment in a way that makes her feel unsafe in her own society. As she moves from childhood to adolescence and her body starts to change form, she begins to feel uncomfortable in her own sexuality, not because of her internal feelings about it but because of the way her mother and society respond to it. When she starts menstruating, she overhears her mother and her female relatives fall into laughter as one of them declares: "Be careful now. She is a woman" (52/ 92). This causes Lina to withdraw into herself and experience feelings of fear and self-consciousness: "Uncomfortable about her developing breasts, she tries to hide them by bending her back, as she walks alongside her mother" (Abudi 164). These feelings of insecurity are related to her entry into adolescence as Peggy Orenstein asserts: "for a girl, the passage into adolescence is marked by a loss of confidence in herself and her abilities. It is marked by a scathingly critical attitude toward her body and a blossoming sense of personal inadequacy" (xvi). What compounds this for Lina is her mother taking no role in preparing her for how to handle the difficulties of this highly sensitive period: "most contemporary daughters say that it was hard to reconcile awareness of their sexuality in adolescence with intimacy with their mothers. They claimed that sexual awareness made them feel more awkward --even distanced them from their mothers" (Phillips 69).

Lina's inability to reconcile awareness of her sexuality with feelings of safety within her home is augmented as she starts to feel unsafe in her society as well. While taking a trip to the old city with one of her classmates, they are both accosted by verbal abuse from the men and women on the street on account of them not wearing a veil: "Women without veils, what do you expect? God save us from the new generation" (156/ 272). This frustrates Lina and matters worsen as they both get sexually assaulted by teenage boys on the street: "a

young teenager took advantage of the crowd and pinched her thigh. Another put his hand on [her friend] Amal's breast" (157/ 275). These incidents heighten Lina's sense of fear and imprisonment: "She was not able to wander in her own city on her own. There was something threatening at all times. She couldn't defend herself. She was burning within, everything around her, in her home, in her school, in her city, followed the same pattern, the same style" (158/ 275).

On a personal level, Lina continues to feel unsafe even when she experiences adolescent love. Feelings of sexuality, sparked by adolescence, drive Lina to fantasize about a boy who is also madly in love with her: "Why didn't she let him kiss her? She wanted to bury her face in his chest. How much she wanted to sin, but she was afraid of something unknown" (57/ 126). What was unknown in her mind became clear as she starts to experience his irrational and foolish jealousy and his possessive demeanor which eventually frighten her: "She felt he wanted her soul, so she resisted him. No, he did not want to meet her as a human would meet a human; both are there, both are separate, yet both are together. He wanted to draw all of her into him, to make her weak so she would depend on him" (162/ 282). Moreover, she saw in him the exemplification of everything she tried to escape: "She wanted a friend, not a master or slave. But he wasn't unique in his strong desire to possess, or in his wild passion to self-abasement. She saw in him the image of the oriental male, the eternal gloom" (163/ 284).

Though she does not receive any support or advice from her mother on how to navigate through her budding sexuality during adolescence and though her encounter with love causes her heartache, these experiences come to strengthen Lina's self-awareness and her understanding of her individuality: "She said to herself that her love did mean selflessness but emphasizing and maintaining the self; not the loss of her humanity, but its restoration" (163/ 284). Maintaining and restoration of the self for Lina always pointed to the

liberation of the self: “He did not care about what she said, what she thought, or what she felt. She was his beautiful woman, his doll, and, like a child who filled the world with his cries, he fought everyone around him to keep her for himself. And she saw him look around lest someone notice her. He wished to veil her from top to bottom” (162/ 282). Thus, at a very early age, she understood that individuation was synonymous with freedom and that liberation cannot be attained through any form of imprisonment: “She wished to be free and she did not find any contradiction between freedom and love” (162/ 282).

As her mother, family, and society “lose authority over her emotions and mind” (Attar, “To Create” 217), Lina’s thirst and quest for knowledge deepens. When she reads *The Mother* by Maxim Gorky, she is taken with the figure of Mrs. Vlasova and wishes that “mothers in this country were like her” (107/ 185-186), a self-assertive woman who joins the socialists’ party and learns to write and to read at a late age. Lina’s longing for a model of a mother can be analyzed through Nancy K. Miller’s assertion that daughters often yearn for “the good mother” (71), whom they keep imagining and longing for and whom they feel can compensate for the mother that has contributed to their “subordinate position in the social order” (Chesler, *Woman’s Inhumanity* 212). Rima explains to her that such arguments should be considered in context, and in this case, it is not a maternal issue. She clarifies to her that the novel is about gender bias through patriarchal repression as an inevitable impediment in the process of female progression. This unsettles Lina as she ponders her sister’s insightful comments and feels the need to be more critical in her analysis.

Rima’s rebellious spirit, revolutionary politics, sympathy for peasants, the pursuit of education, and most importantly, independent mind inspire Lina’s critical and inquisitive spirit. In her, she finds the role model that she so eagerly missed in the figure of her mother. Hirsch argues that “one mother can have devastating effects on the life of her daughter, transmitting not the power to become ‘unalterably oneself’ but frustration instead. The

heroine is an orphan attempting to cut herself from a constraining past, to invent a new story, her own story, and eager to avoid the typically devastating fate of her mother” (46). Thus, daughters, in their attempt at finding “the good mother” and satisfying their need for a role model, which they lack in the figure of their mother, find “surrogate mother figures” within the familial or societal surroundings. For Rich, this explains why daughters “have split themselves between two mothers, ‘one, usually the biological one, who represents the culture of domesticity, of male-centeredness, of conventional expectations, and another, who becomes the countervailing force” (*Of Woman* 246).

Lina finds this countervailing force in Rima’s persona. As early as the ninth grade, she joins Rima in the clandestine political society where she attends meetings with students who promote communist ideologies and views. There, she expands her awareness and gains insight into society and the problems that arise from military dictatorships and imperialism, as exemplified in Marxism, communism, and socialism. The mother’s suspicion of Lina’s venture into politics with her sister arouses fear in her: “You know what I want. Don’t speak politics” (67/ 117), her mother adamantly remarks. To escape her mother’s wrath, Lina realizes that she would have to lie to attend the secret meetings: “She would tell her mother that she had to go to the library, or that she accompanied another girl home to borrow a book” (81/ 144). Phillips attributes a mother’s fear as a “response to paternalistic and cultural pressures, rather than [her] own psychological needs” (40). Those cultural pressures are informed by the autocratic system they live in where “the walls had ears” and where “the family member whispered and never talked in natural voices” (66/ 117). In propagating the social and cultural alarms, Lina’s mother takes the role of “chief inhibitor of female autonomy” (Phillips 40) instead of the role model of “the good mother.”

With Rima’s departure to Aleppo to pursue a job after her graduation, Lina suffers an internal crisis with the parting of her role model: “There was a sudden bitterness in Lina’s

heart against Rima. She wanted to run barefoot in the street to stop the car that took her to Aleppo, to the other world” (128/ 223). To Lina, this other world is away from the imprisonment and contempt she felt inside: “Everything around her is hostile, revolting, and ugly. Nothing is logical. Nothing” (128/ 224). Everything around her felt fragmented and everything filled her with loneliness and despair. At home, she could neither relate to her mother nor Bahiya and her only role model Rima left to pursue her independent life. In school, she felt bored as her inquisitive mind was not satisfied by her teachers: “she saw herself yawn as she imagined herself sitting at her desk for two hours listening to the teacher’s monotonous voice” (133/ 232). Her love interest caused her nothing but hurt and she was repelled by the morality of her society and hopeless about its future. Maggie Awadalla points to the fact that “Attar uses discussions and dialogue in the novel to express the hidden pressures that society as a whole --and women in particular-- are subjected to by the patriarchal authority, represented by the brother’s authority in the house, the military rulers in public life, and the institutions affiliated to it including the schools” (12)¹⁰.

All these factors not only compounded Lina’s feelings of imprisonment but also killed off her spirit: “It hurt her that she had never known pleasure in the company of other people, nor the lightheartedness of young girls her age. Her childhood was dead, probably lost. She couldn’t experience joy, immerse herself in frivolous activities, or laugh with full lungs” (143/ 250). Thus, Lina tries to find comfort in her books and the company of her party comrades: “She will read Plato’s *Republic*. She will underline the just city described by Marx. She will not let chaos rule her life” (128/ 223). In seeking knowledge and in engaging in heated conversations and debates, Lina’s sense of self is heightened, and she starts forming

¹⁰ Original text of the article in Arabic. English translation by me:

"تستغل سمر عطار المناقشات والحوار في الرواية للتعبير عن الضغوط الخفية التي يتعرض لها المجتمع ككل - والمرأة بشكل خاص- من قبل السلطة الأبوية المتسلطة المتمثلة في سلطة الأخ في المنزل، والحكام العسكريين في الحياة العامة، وفي المؤسسات التابعة لها مثل المدرسة."

her own point of view on matters that relate to her socio-political environment. Her opinions vastly vary from those of others around her. In that way, Attar depicts Lina's process of individuation as a result of her years of observation of her environment, her lack of a role model, her journey of seeking knowledge, and her rejection of everything around her: "She felt the years were stretching endlessly and she was a prisoner of a world she hadn't chosen" (120/ 208).

In her heated discussions with her comrades, Lina becomes adamant about her point of view. Between those who subscribe to Arab nationalism, those who believe that the Muslim Brothers are the solution, and those who champion communist ideologies and seek a revolution, Lina feels that she does not belong in their midst: "She couldn't listen to this bickering anymore and didn't understand why the girls did not attempt to convince one another instead of mocking and wounding" (152/ 265). Attar uses the conflicts in opinion to metaphorically depict the various factions which plagued her country and their effect on Lina's individual mentality: "She imagined a ship without a captain sailing aimlessly, her passengers spoke different languages and each of them wanted to steer her" (152/ 265). Moreover, Attar delineates the interplay between the individual and the collective, cementing Lina's individuation from the group: "Lina turned in the direction of [her friend Samira's] voice who said to her: 'You are an independent thinker. But by withdrawing into yourself, you belong with those who don't care.' No, she won't let anyone buy her soul, [Lina] thought" (152/ 266).

Lina's self-realization in the next chapter of her journey is marked by her strong sense of individuation, rooted in her struggle against the chains which she confronts in her environment:

Life is full of chains. We have to accept them. Anger choked her, she
swore secretly never to surrender. She realized what the word chains

meant. She always had to say YES; She has to accept everything her mother said, or Bahiya, or the religion teacher, or the party girls in the school. She had to obey. She was not supposed to think or argue. And if she was allowed to think, then she has to take the decision of the majority as her own. The group was over the individual, the family over everybody, and the men were the ones who form the consciousness and values of the nation. (153/ 267)

Attar encapsulates Lina's thinking through this formative passage as Lina starts to fathom the true nature of what she is struggling against. Firstly, Lina rejects her mother's submission and life of chains manifested in abiding and acquiescing to her circumstances, which she adamantly rebukes. As Herman and Lewis assert: "The oppressed condition of women is thus the ultimate, usually hidden, source of the daughter's disappointment in her mother, and it fuels the daughter's desire to separate and be different from her mother" (152). Thus, one can argue that Lina's process of individuation begins with separation from her mother:

It could be said that ultimately [a daughter] benefit[s] psychologically from the struggle with her mother because it mark[s] boundaries between her mother's values and her own. This allow[s] her to define who she [is] and develop her individual philosophy of life. The conflict with her mother [is] the impetus for her later idealized dream of a utopian, four-gated city, beyond domestic squabbles and political differences. (Phillips 5)

In her process of deconstructing Lina's constant dream of a utopian city, Attar links it to the notion of individuation which goes against society's propagation of the group over the individual: "A man's country comes first, and we have no place for individualists, be they poets or mystics" (158/ 276). Secondly, Attar hones on what had greatly impacted Lina's narrative which is exemplified in the interplay between the individual vis-à-vis the influence

of family and the impact of men forming the consciousness and values of the nation, both of which are rooted in patriarchy. As Gregg argues: “Arab reformers have viewed the patriarchal family as ‘authoritarian’ which carries into the political sphere, providing psychological support to strong men and dictators” (242). In that way, what Lina witnesses in her native city is essentially “political authoritarianism rooted in familial authoritarianism” (242). Elizabeth Debold et al. argue that this heavily authoritarian culture often feels like a “patriarchal wall” (12) which women come up against and often feel obliged to “‘give up parts of themselves’ to conform and be accepted within society” (12). Central to breaking this wall, Debold et al. assert, is the mother’s aid in the act of resistance, which Lina does not find in her mother. Thus, Lina’s dissatisfaction with her environment and her mother’s inability to come to her aid inform her individuation and her rebellion against the walls that surround her.

Lina’s feelings of rebellion came from a life of chains and regulation: “Her life was always regulated, in spite of the rebellion that stirred in its inner hallways” (144/ 251). This rebellious attitude was misconstrued by her comrades as being “defeatist” (156/ 273) and “pessimistic” (157/ 274) for they yearned for a revolution against the military regime. Lina did not believe that political change would have any impact on the dogmas of society. She felt that her comrades were the ones who were unjustifiably hopeful with their “naïve optimism, fantastic resolution, without a clear plan, or a studied program, without wise leadership” (157/ 274). Moreover, she is also aware that change is not in their hands as she asserted: “Don’t you see that all social forces were against change? Don’t you believe that whenever one put up a ladder to ascend, the crowd gathered and brought him down by force?” (158/ 276). All she knew was that she was not willing to pay for the mistakes of the past and she did not have any hope for seeing a change in the generations to come: “Are you going to pay with your own life and person the debts the grandfathers had left behind? asked

Lina” (158/ 276). She could only recognize and see patterns of the past ruling the future.

“Time, time. That’s what you all say. But I will grow old. I’ll be walking like a beast before I see anything change” (157/ 274), she asserted. Moreover, she was beginning to comprehend society’s contempt for women: “And do you believe that ordinary people would discard the idea that woman was the punishment and pleasure, an idea that had taken root at the beginning of mankind?” (158/ 276).

On the other side of the spectrum, Arab nationalists, like her mom, “cried silently” (164/ 284) and joyfully over the news of the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, agonized over the Tripartite Aggression on Egypt and subsequently rejoiced again over the union between Egypt and Syria. As Lina hears news of the Egyptians celebrating their success against the Allies by toppling the statue of De Lesseps, she sardonically attributes their actions to “the irrational behavior and stupidity of man” and asserts that “national chauvinism does not help anymore” (166/ 288). Lina is not only dissatisfied with the familial, societal, and national influences around her, but she also realizes, as Barbara Romaine asserts: “that pettiness and self-interest seem to be the dominant motivating forces in each group she encounters, regardless of its affiliation” (202).

Lina could not connect to anyone around her for no ideology satisfied her and she did not have hope for her city, regardless of affiliations: “Despair overcame her, then her abrupt anger routed the lingering vision in her soul. Where could she go? There was no place and on whatever spot she chose to stand, she stood alone. Endless bars sprang in front of her and behind her” (162-163/ 283). Michel Pêcheux proposes three models for understanding the “relational self,” or the self as it relates to --and is affected by-- its environment in the process of subject formation. First is “identification” where the self relates and condones its surroundings, second is “counteridentification” where the self rejects “the ideological forms that society imposes” on it and the third is “disidentification” where the self both identifies

with and --sometimes against-- the dominant ideology (157). Thus, one can argue that by “taking up a position which now consists of a separation (distantiation, doubt, interrogation, challenge, revolt) with respect to what [her society] gives [her] to think and a struggle against ideological evidentness on the terrain of that evidentness, an evidentness with a negative sign, reversed in its own terrain” (157), Lina essentially “counteridentifies” with her environment. This is rooted in the “external determination of [her] subjective interiority” (157) whereby she feels that she is not an autonomous being but rather one that is constantly molded according to the whims of those around her. Consequently, as Lina’s journey progresses into her university years, she feels inundated with the theories and preaching of not only her professors but also the party leaders: “How they stuffed her mind with trash! How they invented theories and found excuses” (193/ 333). This augments the “seeds of doubt and disillusion” (Abudi 170) that are festering within her mind.

Already “counteridentifying” with and rejecting everything around her, Lina becomes unable to reconcile the incongruities between the self and her societal ideals which oscillate between militant nationalism, Islamism, communism, and overall conformism. All of them claim to serve a patriotic cause for the nation but none of them promote individual value and freedom: “How could one build a country before one builds a human being?” she asserts (168/ 293). Thus, she comes to realize that “a social revolution is unlikely to sweep through her country, so she espouses personal freedom, placing the needs of interests of the individual above those of the collective” (Abudi 165). Her renunciation is elucidated in her belief that the path to freedom is an independent one and one that is heavily reliant on the individual. One can argue that Attar delineates that Lina’s self-identification was never a collective one: “It is not ethnicity that matters but oppression, and therefore there seems to be a shift from a nationalist to a moral perspective” (Ghazoul 24-25). This moral perspective, rooted in her feeling of oppression, causes Lina’s isolation as she feels caged and alone. She

senses as though something has eluded her for though she had spent years soaking in everything around her, nothing truly spoke to her and she always felt like she existed outside of others. All that was left was her imaginary visions of the utopian city which assuaged her feelings of loneliness and despair: “Bitterness began to surge in Lina’s soul, and she felt that she should smash something. No, she would not give in. She tightened her lips in a terrible resolution as if the image of the holy city with its golden bird who sings for eternity had appeared to her eyes in a dark moment” (163/ 283). Unlike the liberated bird in her imagination, she felt lost and questioned “what was she seeking in her long search” (159/ 277).

Lina’s long search, like everything else in her life including her artistic and poetic talent, was thwarted by the repressive conditions which she inhabits. In her mind, artists must depict an authentic and accurate representation of reality, not a utopian interpretation through their art and poetry. Thus, during an art exhibition that she attends, when the artist asked about her poetry writing, she forcefully replies: “How can an artist living in a bloody period of history paint the lanes of the old city bathed in light, or the olive vendors on the bank of a stagnant river playing cards, or Bourgeois women standing in front of mirrors pouring French perfumes? Is it possible that you do not see men being tortured in prisons, or headshots in the distant barracks, or smell blood that stinks in the air?” (200/ 344). When the artist explains that “he who paints violence gets lost in violence” (201/ 345), Lina attacks him by saying: “Is it possible that this violence in its different forms, that of the family against the individual, the state against the citizen, man against woman, the sane against the insane, the enemy against his enemy, would disappear one day?” (201/ 346). Lina’s forceful and potent reply left the artist speechless. This forcefulness was rooted in the fact that even her poetic artistry was not immune to the oppressive society she inhabits. At school, her teacher in religion class had considered her work “scandalous” (171/ 298) because it didn’t quote the Quran and

the Tradition: “You are a poet. But your talent is not dedicated to the will of God” (173/ 300). Lina became furious as she observed him “bang[ing] the desk with his fist” (173/ 299) while he spoke to her with contempt. She couldn’t believe that “all that haunted her mind about justice and equality” was interpreted as “heresy” and “serving the devil” by the contemptuous teacher (173/ 301).

As Lina’s journey progresses, independence becomes “the most essential value in her life” (Alhawamdeh 163). She also fully understands that oppression, in all its forms, is the obstacle to her growth and path to autonomy: “All she wanted was to grow alone, independent from anything that could exert pressure on her mind or deform it” (153/ 266). Essentially all she wanted was to forget everything and leave it all behind. Lina’s epiphany and her decision to leave Syria occurs when she learns about the shooting and death of a peasant student whom she had befriended and who shared with her his mother’s dream of a utopian-like society. The student and the dream had left a deep impression on her, and the incident becomes the last link in the chain of oppressive dynamics that reaffirm the notion that “she couldn’t believe in anything anymore” (212/ 364). In analyzing Lina’s decision to leave, Attar turns the narrative structure from third to first-person narration in the form of snippets taken from Lina’s diary. One can argue that Attar’s change in form to first-person narration echoes Lina’s arrival at her autonomy and finding her voice. In that way, she takes control of her narrative and her story. The diary pages include vignettes announcing her departure and the reaction of her mother, family, and society at large.

Lina never believed that a social revolution would enact change in Syria. Her decision to leave, one can argue, is her personal revolution to gain the independence and liberation she so eagerly yearned for. By deciding to go into voluntary exile, a decision that Attar knows all too well, Lina faces the wrath of all those around her. In her diary, Lina explains that she was “tired of those chains, whether they’re called family, friends or country” (212/ 364). When

her friend Amal questions her decision, her “vision of a heavenly existence” and utopian dream, Lina explains that “the ideal city will become a reality if I were here or not. And if I stay, I will end up in prison or dead. Otherwise, I will rot like the rest of you” (212/ 364). When her professors expressed their shock at her decision and wondered why she harbored so much anger, Lina asserts that she “wanted to keep her sanity” and that she was “tired of being an Arab, a Moslem, and a woman” (172/ 298).

But perhaps the harshest confrontation of all was the one she has with her mother. In her diary, Lina details her mother’s shock at her decision to leave. Lina’s sarcasm is revealed through her interiority and her personal description of the interaction: “My mother told me that learning did not help me a bit. On its account, I rejected my family, society, religion, and country. Laughed insolently. Told her she should have arranged a marriage for me when I reached thirteen. Would God I had. And she sighed. Pushed the cup of coffee and stood up. Did she want me to hatch like her every nine months?” (206/ 353). Even though Lina’s mother propagated education and prevented her from early marriage, Hussein Alhawamdeh argues that “[her mother] is not brave enough to shatter the masculinity of the Arab Syrian society” (166). Lina details how her mother angrily calls her “impudent” and scolds her as she turned her back to walk out the door: “Don’t forget you are a woman. And the woman hatches nothing but children” (206/ 353). Bringing up gender limitations is her mother’s reminder to Lina that, despite some of her progressive views, “[her mother was] brought up not to violate the males’ authority and gender roles and still looks for a limited space within the masculine discourse” (Alhawamdeh 166).

The confrontation with her mother cements Lina’s decision to leave as it serves as a reminder of the plethora of contradictions that found their nascence in her relationship with her mother and extended to everything that she experienced in her family, society, and country at large. By breaking away from it all, like Attar, “Lina is able to transcend the

patriarchal limitations of women's education and liberty, by informing the reader about the Arab Syrian female experience in the local Syrian culture" (Alhawamdeh 155). Lina's process of self-formation and path to autonomy is paved by her ability to relinquish all these influences to form her own narrative and carve out her own voice--a voice that is informed by an inquisitive mind, an artist's free spirit, and a longing for a utopian ideal where the individual is valued and where equality and justice are the collective rules. As Attar asserts: "Lina is certainly not me in every facet of life, but she very well embodies my deepest longing for freedom and my never-ending struggle to throw off the restrictions imposed on my mind by family, religion, and nation" (Attar, "To Create" 219). Like Attar, Lina's decision to leave is not an escape but an alternative path to self-realization and autonomy.

IX. Conclusion

In her seminal book *Of Woman Born*, Rich admonishes women to recognize the central role their “daughterhood plays in their identity and self-definition as women” (255). Rich’s assertion is rooted in the fact that she considers the mother-daughter relationship the most formative relationship in a daughter’s process of self-realization: “The cathexis between mother and daughter --essential, distorted, misused-- is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of whom has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other” (255). This formative relationship has not only inspired psychoanalytic, sociological, anthropological, and feminist studies, but it also serves as the basis for countless fictional and autobiographical literary works. While multiple layers of influence such as familial and sociocultural institutions affect how consciousness is formed, generational transmission, through the maternal figure, is paramount. Hirsch argues that “before the familial can be transcended or left behind, all positions within the family must be probed from all directions, including that of mothers and daughters” (12). Daughters, therefore, cannot narrate their personal stories without including the influence of the mother or the maternal figure. Mothers pass on the social definitions of their daughters’ expected role as a woman, which have paramount effects on the daughters’ individual development and process of individuation.

The literary works discussed in this research, whether autobiographical or fictional, have been carefully curated to present various portraits of Arab family life and the nuanced insights and idiosyncrasies of the sociocultural variables of the time. More importantly, they depict part of the personal stories of their narrators. As the research delineated, the fictional works depict autobiographical undertones and represent part of the histories of their writers.

In that way, they illuminate highly subjective female Arab voices during a volatile time in their nation's histories. Essentially, through their narratives, Arab women writers were breaking the silence engulfing the personal facets of women in their societies: "In removing the veil of silence that shrouds the most traditional social institution in Arab life—the family—Arab women writers venture into a forbidden territory: the private, sexual, political, and religious" (Abudi 273). Venturing into this uncharted territory and demystifying the intricacies of the Arab family, considering the honor attached to the privacy of this revered social institution, was a seminal endeavor. Thus, the act of writing becomes an act of autonomy for the writers as subjects and writers of subjects. By opening a window into the forbidden sphere of Arab familial and societal life, deconstructing the family dynamics, and delving into the interiority of the self, their works can be considered social documentations of their time.

As the research shows, there are a plethora of similarities between the heroines who, while exemplifying distinctive and singular points of view, spoke a universal truth about the conditions of women in the Arab collective experience from the 1940s to the 1960s. Within their familial and cultural milieu, the heroines faced oppressive conditions and gender inequality. In her description of the obstacles facing women growing up in the Arab society, El Saadawi alludes to these conditions and asserts that the "education of female children is transformed into a slow process of annihilation, a gradual throttling of her personality and mind" (13). By relaying the interiority of the experience of growing up in the Arab world, the writers depict an intimate account of the Arab family as the site of female subjugation and repression and offer insights into how the prevalent cultural value systems are weaved within the fabric of familial and societal life. In deconstructing the narratives from this standpoint, the research identifies mothers as the catalysts for propagating these value systems in their ardent collaboration with the patriarchal system of power and control. Feminist theorist Luce

Irigaray argues that: “The mother/daughter, daughter/mother relation constitutes an extremely explosive core in our societies. To think it, to change it, leads to shaking up the patriarchal order” (qtd. in Kuykendall 265). Thus, as the primary caretakers and nurturers who are responsible for the socialization of their children into the cultural value systems, mothers present the primal and most formative relationship for the heroines. In that way, mothers can be a catalyst for change or serve as an obstacle in their daughters’ process of self-development, an impediment to their liberation and independence, and a collaborator with conformity to customs, traditions, and conventions. On the whole, the research delineated a tripartite structure that dominated the three narratives; respectively. Firstly, the three heroines were very much affected by the mother-daughter relationships within the familial and socio-cultural context, which had a pronounced impact on their journey of subject formation. Secondly, the interplay between the individual and the collective was of great impact on their motivations and subsequent courses of action. Finally, the heroines were trailblazers since they went beyond the norm and broke the generational cycle; by facing their trials and tribulations, they managed to carve out their own path to autonomy and liberation, essentially, their own voice.

In analyzing the narratives, one of the main tropes experienced by all three heroines is imprisonment and oppression within their familial, societal, and cultural milieus. Augmenting those feelings of repression are gender role expectations and socialization, which are ingrained in the fabric of the culture and propagated by their mothers. Thus, one of the main points of similarity between the narratives is that they can all be categorized as matrophobic texts. Matrophobia is, as Rich’s seminal work emphasizes, “can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free” (*Of Woman* 236). In these instances, daughters feel pity,

contempt, rage, and betrayal toward their powerless and submissive mothers in the face of patriarchal and oppressive environments.

Fadwa's trauma with her mother in Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography* stems from her mother's lack of nurturance and neglect, which was augmented and fueled by her mother's inability to protect her from the male-dominated and patriarchally-driven values that she, and her mother, had to endure. This left Fadwa with wounded self-esteem and self-image issues which stemmed from her festering childhood trauma caused by her mother. Moreover, her inability to receive the needed nurturance from her mother was exacerbated by feelings of powerlessness which prompted her need to separate and define her autonomous self. Fadwa's mother operated within the boundaries of "patriarchal motherhood" which caused Fadwa to fear inheriting her mother's fate. This conflict caused an internal split within Fadwa's selfhood between a need for belonging and a desire to break free. Tuqan's narrative portrays an awareness of a self that is divided into disputing selves. Those selves, which were all mediated through her primal relationship with her mother, were in a perpetual conflict between diverse dichotomies: nurturance and autonomy; submission and rebellion; and occupation and liberation.

Like Fadwa, Lina, in Attar's *Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl*, also lacked nurturance from her mother, and though her mother propagated for her education and refused her early marriage, the narrative reveals that her mother's actual reality was still rooted in the patriarchal structure she inhabited. Moreover, her mother's patriarchal ideals fail to satisfy Lina's highly inquisitive mind and creative spirit which also causes her to distance herself from her mother. Her final confrontation with her mother reveals her mother's true beliefs that a woman's place lies in marriage and motherhood. More importantly, though her mother was an ardent believer in education; in the end, she blamed education for Lina's rejection of

her family, society, and country. This cemented the idea that despite some of her progressive views, her mother's deep socialization into the patriarchal system of values couldn't be overcome within herself. In al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*, Layla's mother's "patriarchal motherhood" was deeply rooted in the *usul* (fundamentals) that ruled their society and informed how she mothered and made choices for her daughter. Moreover, her mother promoted the culture's definitions of gender assignments which augmented the discrimination against women since different rules apply to men and women. Layla's marriageability and worth in the marriage market was not only her mother's obsession but also how the mother defined her personal worth. Moreover, it was how she assessed her daughter by only concentrating on her physical viability in the marriage market. In that way, Layla's mother embodied the model of "patriarchal motherhood" by expecting her daughter to follow in her footsteps and objectifying her to increase her marriageability to attain her sole purpose and goal in life, exemplified in marriage and motherhood.

In analyzing the impetus behind the adverse representation of mothers in Arab women's narratives, Joseph Zeidan suggests that the "bad mother" trope is part of women's process of arriving at independence, especially considering the cultural context of the time, as he asserts:

Like women in many patriarchal societies, [mothers] are sometimes in the very difficult position of having to negotiate power for themselves at the expense of other women's power and of wanting to find validation for their own lives, based on old ways, in the lives of daughters who want to destroy the old order. A mother may be "portrayed" by the daughter as an evil and willing tool of patriarchy, but such a mother is entangled in a complex web of power struggles and is not simply the enemy. (144-45)

From that standpoint, many feminist theorists consider that blaming the mother is unfair, prejudicial, and inconsiderate of the context and the conditions that mothers had to face. Rich reiterates this by asserting that it is “easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright rather than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her” (*Of Woman* 235). What Zeidan and Rich are arguing is that through their personal struggles, which find their climax during adolescence, daughters can be blinded to the fact that their mothers have had to fight their own internal battles against the very system that their daughters have to endure.

Being collaborators with the system is, at times, their only form of protection for their daughters because they don't have the knowledge, financial means, or support system to aid them in breaking their societal norms. Moreover, mothers innately recognize that the age-old systems are impossible to break through and they fear that their daughters' rebellion will harm their reputations and honor, two of the essential values in the patriarchal order: “The threat of invalidation of life experience, combined with the intense pressure on women and mothers to protect the family honor even from things beyond their control is more than enough to create a “bad mother” from a daughter's point of view— especially if the daughter is rebelling against tradition” (Zeidan 145). Often societal rules propel mothers into thinking that being good mothers means that they need “to disconnect from their daughters and begin to see them as society will” (Debold 36). Being on the receiving end of this thinking, daughters feel betrayed by their mothers who feel impelled to support their daughters yet send conflicting messages so that “rather than strengthen girls, this breach of trust leaves girls weakened and adrift” (36).

In combating the essence of the conflictual relationship between mother and daughter, one must consider that most of the narratives in the literary tradition, including

the ones presented in this research, are daughter-centric. In other words, they tell the story from the daughters' point of view without giving credence or consideration to the mothers' narratives. Evelyn Fox Keller argues that "few of us ever get to know the real mother, her real power, or the limits of her power. It is integral for feminist theorizing to assume a maternal position and occasionally speak in a maternal voice and discourse, based in maternal experience and capable of combining power and powerlessness, authority and invisibility, strength and vulnerability, anger and love" (111). Apart from Attar's depiction of Lina's mother's rationale for propagating education, based on her personal history, the motivations of the mothers are never explored or understood. Hirsch argues that "unless feminism can begin to demystify motherhood, and by extension female power more generally, fears and projections will continue. Feminism might begin by listening to the stories that mothers have to tell, and by creating the space in which mothers might articulate those stories" (167). To that end, attempting to demystify the mother-daughter conflict is vital in challenging the patriarchal order and liberating women from its oppressive hold. Suzanna Walters argues that the dismantlement of the male-dominant structure is rooted in the mother-daughter dyad: "the relationship of mothers and daughters is central to the important question of changing the traditional structure of the family. If mothers and daughters are indeed the bridge of family life, then it is precisely this bridge that will need to be rebuilt so both mother and daughter can walk over it in the search for new, non-oppressive family forms" (8).

Due to the complicated relationships the heroines experience with their mothers, they seek refuge in surrogate relationships to compensate for the "good mother" (Miller 71) whom they keep yearning and longing for and whom they feel can compensate for the mother that has contributed to their "subordinate position in the social order" (Chesler, *Woman's Inhumanity* 212). For Fadwa, her brother Ibrahim comes to represent a surrogate for her

mother. Her mother's failure to understand and nurture her caused her to see herself as a misfit and consequently seek support, kindness, and tenderness from her brother. Thus, it is the mother's absence and negligence that creates the space for the brother to fulfill.

Contextually, Fadwa's need for surrogacy comes into play not only as a reaction to her mother's absence but also as a source of legitimization and validation of her poetic voice, which her brother does by nurturing her talent. Similarly, Lina also seeks a surrogate in the form of a role model in her sister Rima. Rima's rebellious spirit, revolutionary politics, sympathy for peasants, the pursuit of education, and most importantly, her independent mind inspire Lina's critical and inquisitive spirit. In her, Lina finds the role model that she so eagerly missed in the figure of her mother. Thus, whilst her mother takes the role of "chief inhibitor of female autonomy" (Phillips 40) because of her propagation of the dogmatic notions of the time; her sister, being on the other end of the ideological spectrum and embodying Lina's intrinsic outlook on life, becomes Lina's transitional role model.

Similar to Lina, in *The Open Door*, while Layla also seeds a surrogate mother in her brother Mahmoud, who embodies her budding nationalistic aspirations, finding love and turning to men becomes her way of compensating for her disdain of societal rules and her conflictual relationship with her mother. Layla's sense of betrayal by her mother due to her powerlessness and the passive role she plays in imprisoning herself and her daughter in the rules, fundamentals, and rubrics of the patriarchal society is the main source of grievance she experiences. The lack of an empowering mother-daughter dynamic weakens Layla's ability to fight for any rights within the family, confirms her devaluation in the ongoing fight for liberation, and forces her to turn more exclusively to men as surrogates. As the research shows, however, daughters are never quite satisfied or able to replace the nurturance, validation, and sense of power they sought through their surrogate relationships. With Fadwa, her brother Ibrahim's death caused her to feel lost and depressed and she sought refuge in her

other brother, in her constant search for nurturance and care. Similarly, Layla first sought refuge through her brother and then, with the constant feelings of emptiness and abeyance, transferred those feelings to dependence on men, none of which made her feel whole. For Lina, as her awareness grows and Rima leaves for Aleppo, she finds herself lost in feelings of despair and loneliness.

In their mothers' inability to fulfill the role of the "good mother" and their mothers' failure to "[become] the object of idealization and nostalgia" (Hirsch 14), the heroines face a dichotomy between a need for nurturance and, simultaneously, a quest for autonomy and individuation. Daughters first learn about their place within the collective in their mother's universe. In that way, mothers pass on the social definitions of their daughters' expected role as women, which have paramount effects on the daughters' individual development and future choices. The three narratives depict paradigms for introspection in the interplay between "hegemonic and dissenting voices" (Hirsch 9) and between individual and collective motivations to arrive at an autonomous self. To that end, the heroines' "disidentification" and "counteridentification" with conventional and established constructs influence their self-autonomy and their process of individuation--essentially how they find their voices. The women writers studied have created characters "who define themselves by their dissenting relation to dominant tradition" (Hirsch 8). Thus, the interplay between the individual and the collective comes to play an integral role in the narratives.

This interplay is at the base of Tuqan's narrative as she probes her interiority and dissects her childhood, family life, societal influences, and national occurrences, and situates her narrative in the interplay between the individual self vis-a-vis the institutionalized collective. For Fadwa, this interplay between what she was intrinsically drawn to in her poetry versus what was expected is delineated in the individual and collective dynamics,

which presented a major hindrance in her path. Fadwa's personal poetry was her way of carving her own voice and expressing her intrinsic self. This contradicted with the patriotic aspirations laid out by her father which placed her under the pressure of becoming a national spokesperson for the Palestinian people. Like Tuqan, al-Zayyat's narrative is rooted in the interplay between the individual and the collective. In Layla's case, the key catalyst for finding her personal liberation from the constraints of family, society, and gender-- essentially, a path to self-realization and self-fulfillment-- lies in the interplay between individual ideals and societal realities and the fight for national liberation. This dichotomy between the private and public spheres is portrayed by al-Zayyat through the parallel she created in the text between the fight for liberation against the colonization of women in patriarchal structures and Egypt's ongoing fight for liberation from British colonization. Essentially, the private and the public are closely interwoven so that Layla's coming-of-age parallels "Egypt's own coming-of-age" (McLarney 189). For Attar, this interplay is situated in Lina's narrative told through her refutation of family, social convention, and religious dogma. Thus, the interplay between the self and the other, the individual and the group dominates Attar's narrative through Lina's journey of the self, which is delineated in her interactions -- and ultimate rejection of-- her familial, societal, and cultural milieu. Everything around her felt fragmented and everything filled her with loneliness and despair which augmented her feelings of rebellion, rooted in a life of chains and regulation. Lina could not connect to anyone around her for no ideology satisfied her and she did not have hope for her city where she felt that she is not an autonomous being but rather one that is constantly molded according to the whims of those around her. She was repelled by the morality of her society and hopeless about its future which augmented her renunciation of everything around her and amplified her belief that the path to freedom is an independent one and one that is heavily reliant on the individual.

While the heroines' paths to selfhood are wrought with conflict, rooted in their relationships with their mothers and depicted in the interplay between the individual and the collective, their journey towards their autonomous voices is as unique as their narratives. Their paths to selfhood reside in the story of the integration of their multiple and split selves into an autonomous whole, each in her own way. As Gerda Lerner asserts: "While all women have been victimized in certain aspects of their lives and some, at certain times, more than others, women are structured into society in such a way that they are both subjects and agents" (234). Thus, the heroines' route to agency and shift from object to subject, one can argue, is realized through their conscious efforts to *produce* their selfhood and arrive at their autonomous selves, away from their mothers and their societal and cultural influences. This *production* of the self is essentially the shifting from their "inherited" selves by breaking the cycles of maternal generational transmissions and their "relational" selves by standing up to societal norms, thus allowing their "intrinsic" selves to come to fruition.

Tuqan's path to agency is ultimately realized through verbal expression. Not only through poetry, but through the act of narrating her autobiographical self. In that way, her autonomy is elucidated through her poetic voice so that rather than being subjugated by the events of her life, she controls them through her narrative. Her personal narrative is a melange of the private and public remonstrance against the motherly, familial, and societal structures that tried to mold her and predetermine her path in life. Breaking through the walls of silence enforced upon women, she put an end to her marginalization and shifted herself from object to subject and, in so doing, found her autonomous voice. In that way, the act of writing itself becomes an act of autonomy and liberation.

For al-Zayyat's Layla, while the merging between the private and the public spheres plays an integral role in the formation of her selfhood, her story is essentially a story about

the integration of multiple and split selves into a harmonious whole. As such, Layla's story becomes a trope for the nascence of feminist consciousness and liberation which coincides with the nation's liberation, which al-Zayyat hones on by placing the nation's struggle for liberation as the catalyst and inspiration for Layla's quest for autonomy. In the end, it is the search for her own voice that sharpens the lines of Layla's quest for national liberation and political freedom and ultimately leads her to open the door for her autonomy in life and love. For Attar's Lina, the plethora of contradictions that found their nascence in her relationship with her mother and extended to everything that she experienced in her family, society, and country at large enforced her sense of autonomy and placed the individual ahead of the collective. Her process of self-formation and path to autonomy, which culminated in her decision to leave, was paved by her ability to relinquish the collective influences to form her own narrative and carve out her own voice: a voice that is informed by an inquisitive mind, an artist's free spirit, and a longing for a utopian ideal where the individual is valued and where equality and justice are the collective rules.

The heroines' quest for autonomy makes them trailblazers in their ability to break through the familial, societal, and cultural mold to arrive at the paths they chose to find their autonomous voices. By achieving these "life-affirming" (Trebilock 267) choices, through a poetic voice, a nationalistic stance, or a courageous exile toward a free life, the heroines not only opened the gates of imprisonment for themselves but also inspired others to follow suit. Considered as socio-cultural documentation of their time, the narratives of Tuqan, al-Zayyat, and Attar disrupt the existing canon of their time by depicting a new truth about how female (and arguably feminist) consciousness is shaped. This is integral not only as a discourse for academic study but, more importantly, it opens the space for scholarly dialogue on how to break the status quo of generational and familial patterns and transmissions that have historically impeded women's growth.

If breaking generational patterns and transmissions is part of the feminist project, then demystifying the conflictual mother-daughter dyad should be its most integral priority. The dismantling of the patriarchal hold on the family and society cannot be accomplished solely with the daughters' liberation, but when both mother and daughter "are empowered to struggle and resist" (Walters 8). Valentine M. Moghadam argues that "women are at the center of change and discourse about change in the Middle East" (237). In their capacity as primary nurtures and agents of socialization --whether as mothers, or daughters, or daughters that may potentially become mothers-- women in the Arab world can have the potential of altering the familial, societal, cultural, and political landscape in the Arab world. As such, the relationship between mothers and daughters is pivotal as they are key players in challenging the existing patriarchal ideologies and institutions. These institutions inform the motivations behind how mothers mother their daughters and affect the dynamics of their relationship, as Abudi observes: "patriarchal oppression frequently exacerbates the rivalry, hostility, and tension between female family members" (307). This hostility cannot harbor a space for empowerment and growth which is needed for not only their liberation but for generations to come. Without empowerment, reconciliation, and solidarity between mothers and daughters "the dismantling of the patriarchal family cannot be achieved" (Abudi 307). As Adrienne Rich asserts: "Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness" (*Of Woman* 246).

From a feminist perspective, the heroines' rebellion against their mothers symbolizes the female quest for autonomous selfhood and the pursuit to alter the existing patriarchal order in an attempt at finding their voices. As the research shows, the heroines did not seek to hear their mothers' stories, their motivations, or their hardships. By not hearing their mothers' voices, they couldn't hear theirs. They took the harder road of going through their

journeys unhealed and constantly searching for something outside of themselves. This healing, as Luce Irigaray asserts, is the first step against the paralysis and inability to act resulting from the “life-destroying breach between mother and daughter” (qtd. in Trebilcot 267). Though the heroines eventually found their way to autonomy, the heroines’ journeys were harsh and often filled with despair. Alternatively, working through their relationships with their mothers should have been an essential part of their voyage of self-discovery and self-development.

In her seminal poem “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other,” Irigaray poetically draws on the symbolic separation and symbiosis between mother and daughter: “But we have never, never spoken to each other. And such now separates us that I never leave you whole, for I am always in your womb. Shrouded in shadow. Captives of our confinement. What I wanted from you, Mother, was this; that in giving me life, you still remain alive” (67). Daughters yearn for their mothers because, deep down, they know that it is the only truly nurturing relationship they will ever experience. If ever true and unconditional love existed, then it would be tied to the creases of their mothers’ souls. As the research shows, this relationship is also a volatile one as it holds within it the baggage of unspoken words and truths that are ever so hard to face. The mother is the ultimate feminine, her womb is a daughter’s first universe. Daughters’ placement in the male-dominated world has forced them to relinquish those feelings and to harbor resentment for anything and everything that reminds them of who they once were, in their mothers’ world, in their wombs, and they spend their whole lives trying to find their way forward.

What this research aimed to demonstrate is that while mothers do play a role in the institutionalized patriarchy, they are also victims of the same fates their daughters had to endure. Their actions, which were often seen as a betrayal by their daughters, were

instinctually enacted as mechanisms for survival and endurance. They were also victims of victims who did not have the chances, the rights, and the evolving cultural liberties their daughters did. Their stories were not told, and they often suffered in silence. If the literature examined revealed anything, it would be that in analyzing the sociocultural dynamics of the time, a certain amount of empathy should be considered for women in general, for what mothers have had to endure and for what daughters must fight against to break through generational transmissions and patterns of thought. For the feminist project to truly change the patriarchal landscape, for daughters to be fully liberated, to be able to find their empowered voices and way forward, and to truly affect change, they must first find their way back, by forging a reunion and a reconciliation with their mothers.

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