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**‘A GENTLE MURMUR’: GENDERED MADNESS
AS A ‘LINE OF FLIGHT’ IN THE WORKS OF
ALICE WALKER AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI
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ABSTRACT

‘A GENTLE MURMUR’: GENDERED MADNESS AS A ‘LINE OF FLIGHT’ IN THE WORKS OF ALICE WALKER AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI

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The present study regards the literary representation of female madness as an ambiguous textual strategy that disrupts the homogeneous conceptualizations of patriarchal and imperial normalcy. Framed within transatlantic feminist nuances, the study examines *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie along with *Meridian* (1976) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) by Alice Walker in an attempt to demonstrate the multi-dimensionality of the black madwoman. These works reflect the racial and gendered otherness inherent in the culturally circumscribed black female subjectivity through the madwoman paradigm. The study foregrounds the intertextual parallelism of this otherness within motherhood, sexuality and ethnic/racial identity formation, all of which are manifested in unconventional narrative structures. Applying the concept of ‘the line of flight’, coined by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, the study scrutinizes the inextricable link between the creative/destructive potential of madness and one’s (in)ability to foster a heterogeneous identity. This link enables the madness narrative not only to expose social contradictions but also to transform individual and communal conceptions of gender, ethnicity/race and cultural history. Therefore, the study shifts the focus of female madness from the dichotomous interpretations of resistance and submission to the importance of internal heterogeneity. In this light, the study has observed a correlation between the black madwoman's potential to induce societal transformation and her ability to form a heterogeneous sense of self. This correlation indicates a transformational literary space in the selected works wherein monolithic discourses of madness and black femininity are diversified and reconstructed.

Keywords: literary madness, African diaspora, line of flight, liminality, femininity

Öz

‘HAFİF BİR FISILTI’: ALICE WALKER VE CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE’NİN ESERLERİNDE ‘KAÇIŞ ÇİZGİSİ’ OLARAK CİNSİYETLEŞTİRİLMİŞ DELİLİK TUĞBA ELMAS

Bu çalışma, ataerkil ve emperyal normallik söylemlerinin homojen kavramlaştırılmalarını bozan kadın deliliğinin edebi temsilini muğlak bir metinsel strateji olarak ele almaktadır. Çalışma, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’nin *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) ve *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) ile Alice Walker’ın *Meridian* (1976) ve *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) eserlerini siyah deli kadının çok boyutluluğunu ortaya koymak amacıyla transatlantik feminizm çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Bu eserler, deli kadın paradigmasını kullanarak kültürel sınırlandırılmaya maruz kalan siyah kadın öznelliğinin doğasında var olan ırksal ve cinsiyetlendirilmiş ötekiliği yansıtmaktadır. Çalışma; annelik, cinsellik ve etnik/ırksal kimlik oluşumu bağlamında bu ötekileşmenin metinler arası ilişkisini öne çıkarmakta ve bu unsurları gelenek dışı anlatı yapılarıyla göstermektedir. Ayrıca bu çalışma, Félix Guattari ve Gilles Deleuze tarafından türetilen ‘kaçış çizgisi’ kavramından faydalanarak deliliğin yaratıcı/yıkıcı potansiyeli ve bireyin heterojen bir kimlik oluşturabil(eme)mesi arasındaki kaçınılmaz bağı incelemektedir. Bu bağ, delilik anlatısının yalnızca toplumsal çelişkileri ortaya çıkarmasına değil; birey ve toplumun cinsiyet, etnisite/ırk ve kültürel tarih algılarını da dönüştürmesine olanak sağlamaktadır. Çalışma, kadın deliliğinin direniş ve itaat şeklindeki ikili tahlilinin yerine içsel heterojenliğin önemi üzerinde durmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, siyah deli kadının toplumsal değişim potansiyeli ve heterojen bir benlik duygusu oluşturabilmesi arasında bir ilişki gözlemlemiştir. Bu ilişki, seçili eserlerde monolitik delilik ve siyah kadın öznelik söylemlerinin çeşitlilik kazandığı ve yeniden yapılandırıldığı dönüşümsel bir edebi alanın oluşumuna işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: edebi delilik, Afrika diasporası, kaçış çizgisi, eşiklilik, kadınlık

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To my parents, Nilgün and Erdoğan Elmas

ABBREVIATIONS

MER	: <i>Meridian</i>
PH	: <i>Purple Hibiscus</i>
PSJ	: <i>Possessing the Secret of Joy</i>
YS	: <i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i>

INTRODUCTION

THE GENTLE MURMUR¹ OF MADNESS

Exploring the intricacies of the conflictual connections between language and madness in *Language, Madness, and Desire*,² French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault compares the dynamics of literature and madness to that of the sky and the earth, the combination of which brings about a large opening “in which we continue to advance, in which, in fact, we speak” (2015: 39). The way literary works ‘speak’ about and through madness has been interpreted and examined in multifarious ways, leading the topic to be the juncture of conflicting issues of identity, race, gender and the construction of culture. Taking a transnational feminist standpoint in its textual orientation, this dissertation focuses on the literary representation of madwomen in various contexts replete with black female characters who carry and manifest different but complementary facets of diasporic consciousness. The focus of the study entails *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie along with *Meridian* (1976) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) by African American author Alice Walker. Exploring the madwoman paradigm—stuck between structural essentialism shaped by contrapuntal views of female madness—the study seeks to highlight the ways female madness functions as a tool to create internal and external transformation, in contrast to the existing literary studies that tend to examine the images of rebellious and submissive madwoman in an exclusive dichotomy. The aim of this study is to go beyond these exclusive constructions of the madwoman and explore the aesthetic creation of a multi-faceted madness, which shifts the focus from what the madwoman indicates, i.e. the rebel or the victim, to the ways the textual strategy of female madness is utilized as a deconstructive inner journey that

¹ The title refers to Michel Foucault’s exploration of madness where he pinpoints the silencing of madness in various contexts, defining the attempt of madness to speak and activate its own rebirth as “a kind of gentle murmur” (2015: 15). The thesis, likewise, centers around the re-emergence of an unmuted black female subjectivity potentially harbored in the madwoman figure.

² Even though here Foucault’s examination of madness is referred to as a published book, *Language, Madness and Desire* is comprised of oral presentations and radio broadcasts that Foucault conducted. For more information on canonical literature and madness, please see *Language, Madness, Desire: On Literature* (2015).

challenges and refashions the larger structures of social aggregates. Not only do the selected literary works shed light on the cultural, social and political contradictions of the second half of the twentieth-century in their respective communities but they also reflect a non-essentialist, fluid representation of madness. The study argues that this fluidity inherent in literary madness in general and female madness, in particular, is a necessary tool to disrupt the wild madwoman figure, who inflicts external change on social institutions without the elimination of exclusive binary conceptualizations within the self. In turn, these works highlight both the constructive and destructive facets of madness, depending on the potentiality of creating an inclusive and heterogeneous sense of individual and communal identity.

Madness, in its creation of a precarious relationship between the individual and community, conjures up various disciplines including history, psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, anthropology and literature. Even though the dissertation assumes an interdisciplinary approach in its examination of the madwoman figure, the analysis differs from clinical madness. Instead, the definition and exploration of the madwoman are sustained within the framework of literary madness, which, despite showing similarities with clinical madness, foregrounds the liminality of those situated outside the discourse of normalcy and carries its own set of meanings, patterns and representations. In this light, scholar Branimir M. Rieger pinpoints three ways that literary madness is construed in literature: works written by a 'mad' writer, works entailing 'mad' characters and works laden with a critical method that applies psychological conceptions of medical madness to literary characters (1994: 5). The current study takes its lead from the second group of works which, in themselves, reveal conflicting representations of madness. According to Rieger, 'mad' characters function in three different ways. First, a character may become mad, as can be seen in Shakespeare's Ophelia, Lady Macbeth and King Lear, or a character may exhibit certain psychological aberrations such as Holden Caulfield's depression in *the Catcher in the Rye* (*Ibid.*, 7). Second, a non-conformist character may rebel against a restrictive society by either appearing to be mad or actually going mad, like R. P. McMurphy's position in the asylum in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (*Ibid.*). Third, a character may experience 'anomie'—sociological madness—where society seems to 'crush' their personalities and cause their

estrangement from society's 'sane', 'normal' or 'rational' behavior, as seen in Emma in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (*Ibid.*, 8). Manifesting a unique strategy, these portrayals are interpreted and regarded as the cornerstones of the tradition of mad writing. As Rieger argues, literary texts of these 'mad' characters utilize madness to satirize society and its values and challenge the discourse of normalcy. The present study is situated within this discursive structure of mad writing. Rather than romanticizing and oversimplifying clinical madness, the study is positioned within the fictional reflections of deviance and the refutation of what is deemed societal normalcy.

The study, with its focus on the African American and postcolonial female subjects, seeks to expand the definition of literary madness through an interdisciplinary approach. The dissertation utilizes the conceptualization of madness examined in *History Beyond Trauma*, penned by Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière, who regard madness as a tool, not to describe the psychic structure of an individual but to pinpoint "a form of social link in an extreme situation"—such as civil wars or wars of decolonization (2004: xxii). Davoine and Gaudillière propound that the stories of these extreme situations, if untold, return through the mad person whose consciousness manifests cultural memory, which defies the act of forgetting. Scrutinizing female subjects with traumatic cultural histories, the present study aims to explore the relationship between the representation of the madwoman and its potential to mirror forgotten memories of cultural trauma and displacement, which, in turn, potentially renders the black madwoman an agent of a more inclusive process of cultural formation and identity.

Within the non-conformity of mad writing, the madwomen figures in the selected works are situated outside societal categorizations of acceptability and gendered desirability. The study aims to explore the ways in which the respective literary worlds of each text and the abnormality of madwomen are repeatedly constructed against dichotomous conceptualizations of identity. The irrefutable conflict between the mad character and her society centers around the thorny issue of social constructions and the biological reality of madness. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault underscores this ongoing conflict between the self and society through the examination of various historical periods and the multi-faceted

constructions of madness in each period starting from the ancient conception of madness attributed to poets by way of their artistic divine inspiration to the Renaissance, which paved the way for the popularization of madness as a crucial element of artistic expression. However, as Foucault argues, madness is not exclusively associated with art. The subjugation of reason over non-reason brought into focus the concept of difference through madness, which is silenced by incarceration of the different, abnormal and deviant outsiders of each period. In *Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter critiques Foucault's analysis of the mad and claims that despite paving the way for the perception of madness as difference, Foucault's conceptualization of madness does not address to the female, for the irrationality and difference—the basis of madness that requires confinement and estrangement—might also be the feminine (1987: 6). Even though Showalter's critique is well-founded, Foucault's conceptualization of madness as difference and its confinement as the suppression of difference is intrinsic to this study. Similar to the exclusion of difference in Foucault's analysis, the dissertation focuses on the construction of the aberrant female subjectivity, which reveals different facets of black femininity and what is defined abnormal according to the discourse of exclusion depicted in each text. This aberrant figure of the mad female, as common in female madness in various disciplines, reveals societal restrictions over the female psyche and body. Creating a heterogeneous zone of difference between the body and psyche of the madwoman, the selected works manifest similar patterns with regard to female sexuality, cultural nationalism, political activism and domesticity. As the selected novels revolve around the alienation and displacement of female mad characters who occupy a liminal space in these categories, the present study aims to shed light on the dichotomous and hierarchical formations of self, society and history and construe madness as a textual strategy to subvert these dichotomies.

The present study converges the socially constructed dimension of madness and the romanticization of femininity. As the mad character is devoid of conventionality and social acceptability, the reality of her madness, more often than not, has been interpreted either as an indication of resistance against social restrictions of femininity, or submission to those restrictions. The controversy of the madwoman in literary criticism came into the foreground in 1979 with the

publication of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's work *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Exploring the nineteenth-century literature by women writers, Gilbert and Gubar observe in their works "images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves" (2000: xi).³ According to Gilbert and Gubar, not only in *Jane Eyre* but also in other fictional works written by female writers, concerned with the madwoman figure, there is "a common female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" (*Ibid.*, xii). This 'redefinition' of the female experience is sustained through the textual strategy of literary madness observed in the Victorian female writers, based on the conceptualization of women either as angels or monsters. Since *The Madwoman in the Attic* focalizes on Western literature, or Victorian literature, to be more specific, it is Eurocentric in its evaluation of the female experience, defining the 'angel' and 'monster' in ways that might bring about questions of imperialism and cultural superiority within the madwoman trope, as can be seen in the example of *Jane Eyre*, which offers a colonial subject, Bertha Mason, to be the mad 'monster'—double of the angelic European protagonist, Jane Eyre. In "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak accentuates the imperialist motive behind the image of Bertha Mason, who is interpreted solely in psychological terms as Jane Eyre's double by Gilbert and Gubar (1985: 248). As the focus of this study is the black madwoman whose feminine identity is no less complicated than the protagonists of Victorian mad writing, the present study is positioned in the postcolonial critique of the representation of the bestial Other who symbolizes both the black female psyche and sexuality. However, the patriarchal inculcation of the idealized or demonized woman that Gilbert and Gubar point out in Dante, Milton, Goethe, as well as in female writers, is of great pertinence to the examination of madwomen in the selected works. Challenging the imperial nuances of the

³ The book takes its title from one of these maddened doubles in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason—the first wife of Edward Rochester—who is perceived as violent, promiscuous and mad, excluded from socially accepted values and norms of the Victorian society, and therefore, kept out of sight in an attic by her husband. Gilbert and Gubar interpret Bertha's presence in the novel as Jane Eyre's double, repressed self and as Brontë's authorial rage, repressed underneath Jane Eyre's docile exterior.

madwoman paradigm, the dissertation aims to utilize madness as a textual strategy to disrupt and negate the idealized or demonized images of black femininity, both of which are determined by the individual's (non)conformity to the expected female roles created in their cultural and historical specificity.

The maddening of the female eventuates into the feminization of madness, which coincides with the domestication of madness, evoking parallels between confinement and restrictions on the female. Due to this association of female madness with gendered oppression and subjugation, the madwoman figure has created its own area of representation and recurrent patterns. In a similar vein to Foucault's analysis of madness in different epochs of Western civilization, literary critic Elaine Showalter, in *Female Malady*, examines various forms female madness has taken throughout history, shedding light on the link between social acceptability and the construction of gendered madness. Showalter draws attention to the gradual feminization of madness, whereby behavioral norms intrinsic to irrationality and insanity are inextricably linked to femininity both in the otherness of the female psyche and body. The association of madness with femininity is so intertwined that even if it is experienced by men, it is "metaphorically and symbolically" represented and recognized as feminine—what Showalter calls a "female malady" (1987: 4). The combination of madness and femininity is highly rooted in the ambiguous and unpredictable nature of female sexuality. Showalter highlights this connection through the literary representations of madwomen depicted in "the suicidal Ophelia, the sentimental Crazy Jane, and the violent Lucia" (*Ibid.*, 10).⁴ Similarly, American psychotherapist and writer Phyllis Chesler, in *Women and Madness*, accentuates the interconnectedness of socially expected gender roles and the mad-labeling, which is distinctly associated with uncontrolled female sexuality (1972: 104). As the selected works portray female sexuality in close connection with madness, the suppression of

⁴ In parallel with Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter explores the potentially subversive nature of female madness, which, she argues, came into focus with the anti-psychiatry movement that attributed female madness to the oppressive gender roles and celebrated the rebellious female schizophrenic. The movement portrayed schizophrenia as a natural outcome of women's subjugation and as a reaction to conflicting expectations of society regarding femininity. Drawing attention to the female writers' use of schizophrenia in the 1920-1960s, Showalter enunciates the dangers of romanticizing mental illness as power, which aligns with the aim of the present project in its attempt to avoid romanticization of gendered madness.

female sexuality and its role in the feminization of madness that both Showalter and Chesler point out are some of the main concerns of this study. Despite their Western orientation, these texts are utilized in an attempt to unveil common patriarchal conceptualizations of female madness, which creates a sense of alienation and inferiority for the female subject occupying a psychic space of gendered and racial otherness.

Despite exploring the phenomenon of madness in human nature, the current study specializes particularly in black madness, adding to the above-mentioned analyses of madness the racial layer. Even though the outsider status of the mad person as aberrant and deviant remains the same, the inclusion of racial difference to the mad narrative expands the discourse of exclusion and the definition of difference not only to the gendered imaginings of the Other but also to the racial tension in and across cultures. In *Difference and Pathology*, cultural historian Sander L. Gilman defines the negative image of the black and the mad, both of which are converged within the white psyche, as “mythic abstraction” where the myth of illness overpowers the reality of the bitter life conditions of black slaves, leading to the creation of “two abstractions of the Other” (1994: 148). Gilman explains this double-layered mythification of the Other by way of white culture’s projection of its own anxieties over the racial Other. The racial tension permeating black madness, in turn, diversifies the sole conflict between the insane and the sane by bringing out questions of freedom and racial superiority into the madness narrative.⁵ Along with the patriarchal constructions of female madness examined in the Eurocentric texts,

⁵ As will be explored in more detail in the following chapters of the dissertation, Gilman underscores the nineteenth-century perception of black slaves in the USA as “congenitally unfit for freedom”—a view purportedly proved by the scientific evidences of the time that suggested madness in free blacks was eleven times more common than slaves, which was refuted only in the twentieth-century (1994: 137). Correspondingly, scholar Sloan Mahone explores the colonial tension in East Africa, wherein some prophetic movements came about after the First World War, disclosing the civilian unrest of the natives against the colonial powers. Mahone examines the attribution of mental illness to the ‘agitators’ by colonial officers in an attempt to efface the psychological ramifications of colonial occupation and imposition of Western culture on the natives. Although he does not dismiss the possibility of the mental instability in some of the agitators altogether, Mahone underlines the tendency of the colonial registration to label the agitators as individual cases of mental illness rather than an indication of the larger social unrest (2006: 244). There is, then, a link between the labeling of the racial Other as mad and the desire to claim racial superiority in times of communal unrest and chaos. This link is specifically manifested in the selected works since they depict female madness in certain historical moments of unrest and turmoil.

the present study merges the gendered Other with the racial Other in the black mad writing tradition and seeks to underline parallels between the otherness of each exclusive category.

Incorporating the racial dimension of difference into the mad narrative, black female mad writing reflects a deconstructive strategy not only against patriarchal formations of normalcy but also against civilizational encounters of power and racial subjugation. Unlike the white tradition of mad writing, the black female mad writing, more often than not, carries both individual and communal traces of otherness, which renders the black madwoman a figure of cultural healer/bearer. In *Healing Narratives*, American author Gay Wilentz focuses on this crucial role of the black madwoman in the recreation of a healthier sense of self and communal identity, both of which are contaminated by the long-lasting effects of colonialism, migration and cross-cultural interactions (2000: 28).⁶ Whereas the white representations of madwoman foreground the female as an individualist outsider, the black madwoman reflects different layers of subjugation, which complicates the process of her recovery. Madness in black woman studies, therefore, is often perceived to be a strategic tool for the author and the mad character to reveal emotional strength and rebirth. Analyzing womanist fiction, Nigerian writer Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi differentiates the two distinct presentations of the madwoman as follows:

In spite of the blues, black women occasionally go mad. Unlike negatively presented white madwomen, the black madwoman in novels written by black women knows in her subconscious that she must survive because she has people without other resources depending on her; in a positive about-face she usually recovers through a superhuman effort, or somehow, aids others (1985: 74).

⁶ Exploring black diasporic writers in particular, Wilentz includes “Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, and Sandra Jackson-Opoku in the United States, Jamaicans Olive Senior and Michelle Cliff, Trinidadian Merle Hodge, Guadeloupian Simone Schwarz-Bart, Haitian Edwidge Danticat, and Guynese Denier Harris” in her wellness narratives (2000: 28). It is important to note that even though Walker is integrated into the wellness narratives through *Meridian*, Wilentz’s analysis of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* excludes the latter novel. The present study, however, aims to examine the novel in ways that create bridges between the sociocultural critique of *Possessing* and the existing literary criticism that labels it imperialistic and condescending. For more information, please see Chapter Four of this study.

Within this positive construction of female madness in black women's writing, the madwoman exerts, in Ogunyemi's words, "a superhuman effort," which carries the risk of turning the madwoman into an idealized black superwoman. Conversely, critic Marta Caminero-Santangelo, in *Madwoman Can't Speak*, repudiates madness portrayed in women's fiction as a textual strategy of self-assertion and liberation and underscores the helplessness of the madwoman whose set of values and mental state are not eventuated into a meaningful set of signs within the social system (1998: 147). Examining four different novels with liberal and radical feminist nuances,⁷ the current study positions its argument and analysis of black female madness within these contrasting images of the black madwoman as a superwoman and a helpless outsider. All the selected works dwell on recurrent themes in black mad writing including motherhood, sexuality, domesticity and political identity. The dissertation argues that, unlike the stereotypical superhuman reflections of female madness common in contemporary scholarship, the selected works reflect a complex set of racial and gendered otherness by which the idealizations of femininity and blackness are perpetually subverted, transforming madness into a literary strategy for black women's texts to defy the homogenized and unrealistic imposition of the superwoman image. The current study, therefore, seeks to explore the ways madness is utilized to negotiate social constructions of black femininity and the reality of black women's experience. Taking Wilentz's constructive approach toward black female madness and Caminero-Santangelo's cogent arguments about the sense of hopelessness in madness narratives into account, the dissertation aims to create a multi-layered discourse of female madness in diasporic African women's writing.

As part of Comparative Literature studies, the dissertation takes a comparative approach through the analysis of the selected texts in terms of their structural parallelism, the construction of the madwoman and its relation to the sociohistorical critique. Graham Allen's work *Intertextuality* is of pertinence to this study. As Allen argues, intertextuality is an efficient strategy that "foregrounds

⁷ As many scholars have pointed out, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, due to the murderous representations of the madwoman they convey, are considered textual examples of radical feminism whereas *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* delineate the ideologies of gender and their reflections on the madwoman in a liberal demeanor.

notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life” (2000: 5). Drawing attention to the nature of literary texts whose linguistic and literary signs do not have their references to the objects in the external world but “to the literary system out of which the text is produced,” Allen accentuates the importance of the intertextual exchange and multi-layered interpretations of texts (*Ibid.*, 11). The selected works engage in such an intertextual dialogue, where they partake in literary madness in general and black female madness, in particular, and reveal an ambiguous set of meanings within these literary systems. As common in black mad narratives, for instance, all the selected works explore the gendered madness through a non-linear and fragmented narrative structure in which they delineate the liminality of the alienated female. This structural interconnectedness of the selected intertexts reveals the politicization of the madwoman in black women’s writing since all the selected works utilize female madness as a textual strategy to subvert the linear constructions of history, which, to these characters, is disrupted by the colonial encounter and slavery embedded in the liminal consciousness of the black madwoman. Furthermore, the selected works reflect distinct yet complementary viewpoints to the madwoman paradigm by way of their point of origin. Whereas Walker’s novels *Meridian* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* manifest an African American orientation, Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* are shaped by the African perspective. Creating a comparative dialogue within these intertexts, the dissertation seeks to go beyond the analysis of female madness as rebellion or submission and to explore the possibilities of transforming ideologies of race and gender in mad writing by focusing on the link between internal and external change. The study asserts that, through the complementary discussion of the selected works, the madwoman trope might be extended not only to mirror sociopolitical contradictions of their given societies, as can be seen in madness narratives in general, but also to the necessity of individual transformation for communal change in the utilization of the madwoman as a cultural healer. Therefore, preserving the cultural and historical specificity of each text, the present study aims to foreground the connection between the healing potential of literary madness and the creation of a new inner self.

The comparative analysis of the selected works reveals a heterogeneous conceptualization of literary madness that necessitates the repudiation of homogeneous constructions of black female subjectivity. Unlike the literary criticism that focuses on the external relation between the madwoman and the larger society, which indicates the madwoman's rejection of societal values and impositions, the present study accentuates the importance of the internalization of the contradictions the madwoman figure tries to underscore and contest. In all the selected novels, the madwoman is portrayed not only on a liminal space by social standards but also within the homogenized consciousness of the black madwoman herself. The comparison of these works sheds light on the ambiguous nature of literary madness—its creative and destructive potentiality—in direct relation to the madwoman's inner journey, which leads to the un-learning of internalized dichotomies of individual and communal identities as well as creating new and heterogeneous connections with society, or to the exertion of external violence and destruction without inner transformation. This double-natured structure of madness and its insistence on an internal transformation before external change shifts the focus of analysis from the rebellion/submission dichotomy to that of intrinsic heterogeneity and the monolithic external structures. By comparing four texts by two female authors of different origins in the African diaspora, the present study seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship of madness through the shift from exteriority to interiority, which evokes the need to construct a more intrinsic conceptualization of madness regarding the creative formations of gendered and racial subjectivity.

As both Adichie and Walker construct an ambiguous dialogue between madness and transformation, the dissertation employs a double-layered theoretical framework to preserve the fluidity and heterogeneity of mad writing. The analysis of the representation of the madwoman will be explored through the concept of the line of flight⁸—a term coined by French psychotherapist Félix Guattari and French

⁸ In its interdisciplinary approach, the present study shares Deleuze's own understanding of concepts. As Brian Massumi points out in *Introduction to A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze regards concepts not as a brick but a "tool box"—which does not enforce one into an exclusive system one either has to enter or not, and instead can be used in various foreign mediums from painting to politics (2005: xv). Likewise, the concept of the line of flight will be applied to the individual and communal

philosopher Gilles Deleuze in their work *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari analyze both individuals and social aggregates through three lines, all of which are constantly intertwined in a way that defies binary constructions: molar lines, molecular lines and lines of flight. Whereas molar lines are attributed to the aspects of identity and institutions that are well-determined and consist of binary oppositions such as dyadic relations of male-female and black-white, molecular lines function on a heterogeneous viewpoint, which, nonetheless, has its own classifications of race, gender and class. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a social structure is not defined by these two lines but what escapes it—lines of flight—“things that are attributed to a “change in values,” the youth, women, the mad, etc” (*Ibid.*, 216). Similar to madness, lines of flight reveal a leap from dichotomous social structures. What makes the application of the line of flight to the present study important, however, is the rejection of dichotomies in Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization, which gives room for a more inclusive and constructive viewpoint to the madwoman and the social aggregates against which her reaction is constructed:

These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject—anything you like, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions. Groups and individuals contain microfascisms just waiting to crystallize. Yes, couchgrass is also a rhizome. Good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary selection, which must be renewed (2005: 9).

The dissertation applies this binary-free approach to the examination of individual and communal subjectivities, which requires the avoidance of hasty constructions of dichotomies between the individual and the communal, cultural and historical classifications permeating the selected novels.

The study argues that the formless nature of the line of flight aligns with the fluid structure of madness Adichie and Walker portray in their works and can be an efficient tool to demystify the romanticized and demonized images of the madwoman

constructions of segments both in the content and form of the novels without incorporating the concept into a fixed system of signs in black mad writing.

as well as to explore the possibility of new forms of expression and representation for the black female subject. Similar to the literary madness portrayed in the works of Adichie and Walker, Deleuze and Guattari do not romanticize lines of flight, for they entail both creativity and destruction within themselves, depending on their potential to connect with other lines through—what Deleuze and Guattari call—a “transversal movement” (*Ibid.*, 35). Reflecting the creative and destructive potentiality of madness, the selected texts defy the romanticization of madness as a female strategy for rebellion. In both Adichie’s and Walker’s fiction, madness is portrayed in direct relation to the madwoman’s ability not to perpetuate a new set of dualisms but to create inner and outer heterogeneity in forging a new subjectivity. The present study, therefore, seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship through underlining the binary-free constructions literary madness potentially offers as well as the need to reshape social structures in a non-binary manner. Utilizing Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of arborescent and rhizomatic structures, which respectively refer to a homogenized system of dichotomy and a heterogeneous fluidity, the dissertation argues that, unlike the creation of black female subjectivity constructed against maleness, whiteness and sanity, the selected works offer a more intrusive and multi-layered approach to madness and its connection to the individual and communal transformation.

Within this literary and theoretical framework, Chapter One focuses on Adichie’s second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Exploring the Biafran War in the 1960s, the novel contextualizes female madness within the ethnic conflicts in Nigeria as well as the lasting effects of the colonial experience. As in all the following chapters, the chapter is divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section offers historical and cultural background for the novel in an attempt to accentuate the utilization of the madwoman paradigm in postcolonial literature for a re-evaluation and reshaping of history. As the novel centers around the Igbo—the third biggest ethnic group in Nigeria—the section specifically elucidates the effects of the war on the collective consciousness of the Igbo. Applying Deleuzoguattarian notions of molar and molecular segments inherent in social aggregates, the second sub-section illustrates the madwoman, Olanna’s liminal position in a homogeneous cultural space with regard to femininity, sexuality, political stance and Igboness. Excluded from the

discourse of normalcy, Olanna occupies a liminal space, which eventually triggers her madness. Her liminality and need for a heterogeneous black female subjectivity are explored through Deleuze and Guattari's arborescent and rhizomatic systems. The third sub-section analyzes Olanna's madness at the break of the war through a thematic, structural and narratorial framework. The chapter seeks to answer the questions Olanna's madness raises regarding the ideologies of gender and ethnicity and attempts to analyze Olanna's creative experience of madness in light of the deconstruction of social segments in her psyche, paving the way for both individual and communal rebirth.

Exploring another creative representation of the madwoman, Chapter Two is based on Walker's novel *Meridian* whose protagonist, Meridian Hill, goes through madness after a series of psychological trauma and alienation. As the novel is set in the 1960s and 1970s, the first sub-section illustrates the internal and external gender and racial conflicts inherent in the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement within the larger sociocultural tension of the time. The second sub-section focuses on the inculcation of an idealized black woman image at the backdrop of the above-mentioned movements and the ways it reinforces a monolithic conceptualization of black femininity. The chapter connects Meridian's madness with her liminal position, which defies the idealized images of femininity and blackness perpetuated by the political movements. Through the application of the Deleuzoguattarian concept of rhizome, the section also analyzes the link between Meridian's subversive madness and its reflections on the fragmented narrative foregrounding the chaotic social background that shapes the gendered madness. The third sub-section demonstrates the ways Meridian's madness transforms into a creative line of flight through which the formerly exclusive categories of body-mind, male-female and political activism are incorporated into a heterogeneous space for a new female subjectivity.

Offering a different representation of gendered madness from *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, Chapter Three examines Adichie's debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* in comparison to formerly analyzed works. The novel revolves around a Catholic Igbo family whose members experience the long-lasting effects of the postcolonial clashes, which, unlike the ethnicity-oriented *Yellow Sun*, centers around

the concept of religiosity. Contrary to the previous novels, *Purple Hibiscus* portrays the destructive potential of female madness, where the madwoman exerts violence on the outside world without undoing the internalization of the very structures against which she reacts, thereby turning the line of flight into a line of death. The first sub-section of the chapter offers the historical and cultural background for the novel and accentuates the in-betweenness of the (post)colonial subject. The religious conflict between the traditional Igbo and the Christian converts as well as the negative effects of colonialism on the status of native women are illustrated. The second sub-section dwells on the impositions of an idealized religiosity, femininity and ethnic identity on Beatrice, the madwoman of the narrative. Echoing the previous chapters, the concepts of molar and molecular segments are applied to the dichotomous constructions of Igbo culture and religiosity. The exclusive and homogenized understanding of the colonial past and its effects on women are examined through Adichie's textual strategy of silence. The third sub-section explores the symbolic function of Beatrice's ballet-dancing figurines and their relation to her process of forging a new but segmented black female subjectivity. Beatrice's act of murder is contextualized within Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the black hole—permeating every line of flight in the case of lack of connections with other lines. Beatrice's madness, therefore, exemplifies the incompleteness of the subversive nature of madness in the case that the internal change and heterogeneity are not provided.

Chapter Four is based on Walker's controversial novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, which portrays the madwoman, Tashi, within the much-debated issue of female genital cutting.⁹ Walker's examination of this cultural practice urges a dialogue between *Possessing* and *Hibiscus* regarding the madwoman paradigm and its relation to homogeneous cultural spaces that exclude the liminal subjectivities of the madwoman. The first sub-section positions the novel in the divergent discourses of colonial/anti-colonial, Western-African feminism and human rights, all of which

⁹ Even though Walker refers to female genital cutting as female genital mutilation (FGM), scholars have named the practice according to their own viewpoints. While female genital mutilation has been used by scholars who are against the ritual, female circumcision has been preferred by scholars who point out the sociocultural importance of the practice within its specific context. Female genital cutting, on the other hand, has been adopted by scholars who aim to analyze the practice in a neutral manner. Thus, the term female genital cutting will be applied in this study.

offer a unique interpretation of the cultural practice of female genital cutting. Walker's own critique of the practice, as well as the international reaction to the novel as an imperialistic interference, is accentuated. Utilizing the molar and molecular segments for the cultural construct of Africanness and femininity, the second sub-section draws attention to the multi-layered nature of Tashi's alienation—often only attributed to her experience of female genital cutting. The section converges different facets of madness depicted in the novel including cultural homogeneity, an idealized sense of self and the discourse of exclusion shaping the immigrant experience. As in all chapters, the fragmented narrative of the novel with the multiple narratorial voices is interpreted as the disruption of linear constructions of history and cultural identity. The third sub-section explores the creative and destructive potential of Tashi's madness, as the complex structure of the novel delineates destruction through Tashi's act of murder and creativity through her newly fostered non-segmented consciousness.

All things considered, the protean subject of literary madness offers a series of constantly changing representations and patterns based on its specific cultural and historical context as well as the literary system in which a particular text is positioned. The preponderance of female subjects over their male counterparts in madness narratives induces the examination of the boundary between liminal femininity and cultural constructs of abnormality. Gendered madness, in its cultural and social textuality, raises a multi-directional set of questions that remain outside the scope of this study. However, aware of its limitations, the dissertation attempts to contribute to the existing scholarship of madness by shifting the focus from the exteriority-oriented depictions of female agency and power to a more interiority-based analysis of diasporic consciousness. Applying the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the line of flight with its ambiguous nature, the study aims to provide an extensive analysis of black madwomen depicted in the highly unstable ethos of the twentieth-century in the works of Adichie and Walker whose texts in question have often been understudied or situated in a one-sided discourse of cultural disease common in mad writing. By underlining the thematic and structural parallelism between the selected texts, the dissertation seeks to contribute to the understudied dimensions of female madness where the feminized reflections of protest go beyond textual indications of

cultural unrest and function as a discursive strategy through which a heterogeneous conceptualization of black female subjectivity is fostered and prioritized.



CHAPTER ONE

WAR AND MADNESS IN *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*

Exploring Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* in connection with the madwoman trope and the war narrative, the present chapter seeks to analyze the transformative potential of black female madness as a binary-free inner journey in contrast to an external experience of a superficial demand for sociopolitical and cultural reconstitution of black femininity. It aims to address the intentionally conflicting representations of ethnicity, class and gender that *Yellow Sun* depicts through the constant shifts between time and space manifested in the non-linear narrative, both of which are interlocked within the liminal consciousness of the black madwoman. Reflected in these shifts, the intrinsic dynamism of the experience of female madness will be explored within the Deleuzoguattarian concept of 'the line of flight' together with the molar and molecular segmentarities, in an attempt to explore the interconnectedness of different aggregates as well as the fragile and convergent nature of each segment both in individuals and communities. The first sub-section of the chapter will dwell on the Biafran War and its ongoing effects on Nigerian history for the purpose of contextualizing the Igbo identity and its role in the creation of the madwoman figure. The second sub-section will demonstrate the ways that the Nigerian society in the early 60s contradicts its external national identity. The analysis will focus on the construction of a liminal space for the madwoman through these contradictions. The third sub-section will uncover the hidden links between the early 60s and late 60s—phases that are interconnected in the non-linear narrative through Olanna's psychological and physical demise as well as her reaction to the ethnic violence, both of which manifest implications of gendered madness as a creative feminized space within and without.

As part of postcolonial literature, *Yellow Sun* is positioned in the inevitable exchange of political history and its literary representation. The conjugation of literature and politics in the narrative requires the contextualization of the novel within different generations of Nigerian writers whose artistic expression advertently questions the taken-for-granted and monolithic 'facts' of Nigerian history regarding the periods of colonization, decolonization and post-independence. Even though

writers are mostly divided into generations by critics,¹ and each generation is considered to have unique characteristics, they reveal similarities in their engagement with the conflictual nature of the colonial and postcolonial Nigerian history. Regarded as one of the turning points of Nigerian history by many historians and writers, the Biafran War² has been a common subject for Nigerian writers of different ethnicities and generations for various but not always identical purposes. Earlier literary works based on the Biafran conflict tend to reflect the masculine perspective of male writers, among which are Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died* (1972), *Sunset in Biafra* (1973) by Elechi Amadi, *Sunset at Dawn* (1976) by Chukwuemeka Ike, *Survive the Peace* (1976) by Cyprian Ekwensi, *The Last Duty* (1976) by Isidore Okpewho and *Sazoboy* (1985) by Ken Saro-Wiva. Despite the dominance of the masculinized war narrative of Biafra, some female writers have also explored the conflict and contributed to shaping a feminized perspective of the ethnic divide, the traumatic process of decolonization and the multi-rooted domestic problems that are promulgated by the war. Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975) and Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) paved the way for this tradition. Creating a feminized discourse of the war, both female writers have shed light on the women's position as daughters, wives and mothers of the newly-built Biafran community in the larger context of gender politics and national identity. However, integrating Rose Adaure Njoku's *Withstand the Storm: War Memories of a Housewife* (1986) and Phanuel Egejuru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* (1993) into the Biafra-oriented works of these female pioneers, English and Comparative Literature scholar Zoë Norridge underscores the lack of interest in these literary works by female writers, given that

¹ The writers who came out and published around the time of Nigerian independence are considered to be the first generation including names such as Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka and Flora Nwapa whereas the second generation refers to the writers who published after the Biafran War including Buchi Emecheta, Niyi Osundare and Femi Osofisan. The third generation writers, however, were born after 60s and never experienced the colonial rule personally, publishing around mid-80s. They include Helen Oyeyemi, Sefi Atta, Ben Okri and also Adichie (Kurtz, 2011: 24). Nevertheless, it is important to note that some critics, such as Heather Hewett, make a small distinction between Adichie and the other third-generation writers whose careers started in Nigeria. Adichie, as a writer who got her college and postgraduate education in the U.S., Hewett argues, has also followed a path common for American writers (2005: 75).

² The Nigerian-Biafran War is also referred to as Nigerian Civil War. According to Serena Guarracino, this implicitly reveals an attempt to efface the brief existence of Biafra as a separate country (2016: 58).

they are now mostly out of print and are no longer taught in university courses (2012: 20), thereby leading to the loss of the female voice in the communal consciousness of the Biafran conflict.

The lack of attention to the feminized war narratives of the first and second-generation writers has been disrupted by the third generation through the revival of Biafra-based literature. A new perspective on the Nigerian past and the short-lived Biafran experience has been created, interpreted and acclaimed by the younger generation of female writers. Coming right after Sefi Atta's Biafran story *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is a third-generation war novel maintaining a close dialogue with its predecessors regardless of its unique stance. Its deliberate focus on the individual as opposed to the collective, its multiple focal points and critical stance toward both sides of the conflict stand out among other war narratives. The world *Yellow Sun* reflects is a complex world devoid of a romanticized, imagined perfect past and a heroic Biafran identity. Each and every character and event defies essentialist representations and one-dimensionality. In her essay "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran experience," Adichie herself repudiates creating a utopia out of the survivor's sense of defeat and injustice: "I wanted to avoid making Biafra a utopia-in-retrospect, which would have been disingenuous—it would have sullied the memories of all those who died" (2008: 50). Instead, *Yellow Sun* evinces the complexity of identity markers such as a human, a Nigerian, a Biafran or an African. The novel takes a shift from reflecting a one-sided war narrative to the exploration of what it means to be a complex human being with both 'good' and 'bad' sides, thus, it defies the stereotypical images of Africa as a place of backwardness, war and violence. The constantly shifting focal point and time in the novel allows the story to be a war story that disclaims the violent associations of Africa. Adichie, too, touches overtly on the need for a Biafran story that eludes a monolithic and essentialist viewpoint in the same essay:

If I were not African, and if all I knew of Africa came from the U.S. media, I would think that all Africans were incomprehensible people perpetually fighting wars that make no sense, drinking muddy water from rivers, almost all dying of AIDS and incredibly poor. This kind of portrayal makes it difficult for outsiders to see an African as equally human, prompting the Westerner to ask, even if secretly, "Is something innately wrong with these people?" (2008: 45)

This observation sheds light on the dehumanizing and violent image of Africans in the U.S. media. Adichie does not exclusively question the representation of Nigerians, or more specifically, Igbos but all Africans, indicating that the U.S. media do not differentiate between the vast number of cultures, ethnicities and countries in Africa but rather combines them under a homogeneous label of ‘the African’. Conversely, Adichie’s re-examination of the conflict between two ethnicities in Nigerian history urges a more complex and multi-positioned reading of history and its literary representation.

The novel is narrated through the focalization of three distinct characters: Ugwu, a young houseboy of the intellectual revolutionary Odenigbo, Olanna, a well-educated but emotionally insecure African woman, and Richard, a white man who tries to procure a sense of belonging in postcolonial Nigeria. Even though the social, political and cultural dimensions of the Nigerian society are manifested and explored in multi-faceted ways through each and every character, Olanna—the only female focal point of the narrative—holds a key position in reflecting the hidden mechanisms of Nigerian society in general and the war in particular. It is no coincidence that out of all characters, the madwoman trope is employed as a textual strategy for the exploration of the homogeneous constructions of the self and the Other through Olanna. In their examination of the interconnection between wars and mental breakdowns, Davoine and Gaudillière state: “Sometimes a fit of madness tells us more than all the news dispatches about the left over facts that have no right to existence” (2004: xvii). Comparably, Olanna’s temporary madness serves as a mirror to depict the Biafran conflict from a feminized viewpoint that is not easy to come across in the formal documentation of the war. Therefore, *Yellow Sun*, contextualized within the third-generation Nigerian literary works, takes part in the larger political and literary exchange regarding the representation of gendered Igbo subjectivity. Through the exploration of gendered madness in the turmoil of the Biafran War, the novel re-examines the monolithic understandings of history, Africanness, Igboness and femininity.

1.1. The Biafran War and the Construction of Igbo Identity

In parallel with the above-mentioned Biafran War canon by three generations of Nigerian writers, *Yellow Sun* is embedded deeply with the sociopolitical conundrum of the postcolonial Nigeria. The postcolonial state, as many historians and scholars have pointed out, is a state burdened with its colonial past, the angst of decolonization and a chaotic present of post-independence. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, elucidates this endless cycle of clashes between various power structures and the concomitant problems including poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment as well as the dilemma of the unification of people who are trapped in regionalism and tribalism, which makes life in the postcolonial world “an unending struggle” (2004: 51). Correspondingly, Nigeria’s colonial experience was inaugurated when it was taken under the control of the British colonial powers in the Berlin Conference of 1884, engendering the still ongoing ethnic conflicts of the country. Despite the great variety of ethnicities in the region, the Northern part of the country was mostly made up of Hausa-Fulani, the Southwest region consisted of Yoruba, and the Southeast region was dominated by the Igbo. Amalgamated into one national territory and identity in 1914, Nigeria came into existence in direct proportion to the advantage of the British rule but:

[It] worked against the local people, as they lacked: similar cultures; common citizenship with equal rights and privileges; common laws and a common judicial system; equal rights of all citizens before law; rights to acquire property and make a living anywhere in the country; equal rights to employment anywhere in the country and equal rights to protection of life and poverty (Ojukwu qtd. in Makokha, 2014: 112).

The very foundation of the Nigerian state was built on a hierarchical system that prioritized the interests of the former colonial powers and different ethnic groups in disproportionate degrees, which exacerbated the already existing discrepancy among the distinct groups of the newly-composed Nigeria.

The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria created more problems for the colonized ethnic groups. Many scholars have pointed out the ambitious nature of the Igbos and their concomitant advancement in the colonial society despite their minority status among the three dominant ethnicities. According

to the internationally acclaimed Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, Igbo culture, “being receptive to change, individualistic, and highly competitive,” gave the Igbo man an unquestionable advantage over other ethnicities for, unlike the Hausa-Fulani, “he was unhindered by a wary religion,” and unlike the Yoruba, he was “unhampered by traditional hierarchies” (2012: 75). In addition, the critic Paul Anber draws attention to the similarities between the Jews and the Igbos who advanced fastest in the country regardless of their minority status and filled “the ranks of the nation’s educated, prosperous upper classes” (1967: 168). However, Anber also argues that the educational and economic monopoly of the Igbos over other ethnicities, especially the Northerners whom the Igbo looked down on as backward and inferior, led to arrogance and “self-righteousness in their new status” (*Ibid.*). The elevated status of the Igbos as well as their competitive and arrogant attitude created resentment among other ethnic groups of the country. Since the gap between Igbos’ economic and educational status, together with their political and social estrangement, grew, the Igbos as a community “steadily became more tribalistic (i.e. more self-conscious of and actively securing benefits for their own community or ethnic group)” (*Ibid.*, 168-9). This bilateral exclusion of the parties involved broadened the gap between Igbos and other ethnicities of the nation, contributing to the lack of unity among citizens of different origins.

Despite its internal conflicts, Nigeria gained its independence on October 1, 1960, and two years later, its constitution was admitted to the Commonwealth. The literary scholar John C. Hawley argues that the notions of national stability covered the extreme diversity of the nation that had “140 million people; more than 250 ethnic groups” among which were “50% Muslim, 40% Christian, 10% of indigenous faiths” (2008: 16). Nonetheless, the seemingly stable exterior of the country was soon disrupted by the conflicts that resulted from lacking a united national consciousness and a sense of belonging beyond ethnicities or religions as well as the undemocratic and neocolonial foundations of Nigeria’s independence.³

³ Achebe underlines the undemocratic foundation of Nigeria as the British colonial powers left a new governor general, Sir James Robertson in Nigeria before the independence in an attempt to navigate Nigerian elections toward a trajectory that would benefit the British. For more information, please see Achebe’s memoir, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012), 52-54.

Consequently, within six years of colonial manipulation, Nigeria became a “cesspool of corruption and misrule” entailing public servants who spent the national wealth relentlessly, elections that were “blatantly rigged,” judges and magistrates that were manipulated by the politicians in power who were themselves pawns in the hands of foreign business interests (Achebe, 2012: 55). Achebe interprets those six years before the Biafran secession as a time of national crisis, even though the country and the leaders were not willing to face its problems. Highlighting the Nigerian census crisis of 1963-64, the federal election crisis of 1964 and the Western Nigeria election crisis of 1965, Achebe claims that “at that point most of us, the writers at least, knew that something was very wrong in Nigeria” (*Ibid.*, 67). The vicious cycle of crises following the independence signaled the urgency of the deeper issues of political dissonance and homogeneous classifications of Nigerian identity.

Due to the interethnic conflicts and corruption within the political and social sphere, a group of army officers, under the leadership of General Aguiyi-Ironsi, overthrew the existing government with a military coup, commonly referred to as the ‘Igbo coup’, premised on the large number of Igbo soldiers involved, on January 15, 1966 (Anber, 1967: 163). The army officers killed the Prime Minister and took over the government. Even though the coup-makers naively evaluated their actions as a reform against the interethnic competition and tribal politics, the tension in the country regarding ethnic politics and violence took a worse route. The political development and changes in the aftermath of the coup—including the promotion of Igbo officers and General Aguiyi-Ironsi’s status as an Igbo and head of the new military government—were perceived as attempts to establish domination of the Igbo over other ethnicities (Harneit-Sievers, 2006: 123). Only six months after the first coup, a countercoup was conducted on July 29, 1966 under General Yakubu Gowon. The second coup also led to anti-Igbo sentiments, causing thousands of Igbos to be killed and over one million to flee from the North to their homes in the Southeast (Anber, 1967: 164). On May 30, 1967, the military governor of the Eastern region, General Odumegwu Ojukwu announced the secession of the Eastern Region from the Federation and the creation of an independent state—the Republic of Biafra. Five weeks later, the Lagos government interfered with the secession through a “police action” against “rebel soldiers” which then turned into a civil war on July 6, 1967

(Harneit-Sievers, 2006: 123). Contention over oil-rich territories exacerbated the conflict and carried it to the international arena due to Britain-Shell-BP's interest in the area (Guarracino, 2016: 58). On January 15, 1970, the war ended with General Ojukwu's escape from Biafra, and the short-lived country was incorporated back to Nigeria.

The war created severe physical, psychological and emotional scars on the civilians of the newly-built Biafra, which was triggered by the Nigerian troops under the leadership of Gowon who cut the Igbos off from the sea and prevented them from receiving the military and humanitarian supplies overseas. The starvation of Biafrans turned so severe that the International Red Cross called Biafra "its gravest emergency" since the Second World War (YS, 225). It is estimated that over a thousand Biafrans died every day through the end of the war, which was only to be matched with the peak of Gowon's "starve them into submission" policy that led to the death of fifty thousand civilians each month, most of whom were babies, children and women (Achebe, 2012: 192). Achebe asserts that the dead and the physically wounded were not the only cruelties of the war. Even though it was not talked much, there was an explosion of mental illness: "major depression, psychosis, schizophrenia, manic-depression, personality disorders, grief response, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders" that created the madmen and madwomen of the war" (*Ibid.*, 181). The conflict that was first overtly solidified through the first coup of 1966 turned into a physical, psychological and emotional battleground.

The Civil War is key to understand the construction of the Igbo identity and the ongoing effects of a scarred memory in the consciousness of the Igbo. Aside from the sociopolitical outcomes of the war, the conflict has created an undeniable effect on the psyche of the Igbo community and the way the community sees and experiences the past, present and future. The history author and academic Axel Harneit-Sievers argues that the traumatic experience of the war still continues to shape how the Igbo people perceive themselves and their unique role within the larger context of Nigeria—"fundamentally rejected as a group—a group which, in consequence, rejected Nigeria itself" (2006: 124). Furthermore, in opposition to scholars who regard the period of Biafran sovereignty as the ultimate symbol of Igboness, Harneit-Sievers attests that the pre-war phase of the Igbo, being in constant

and productive contact with other groups that came with the migration of the Igbos within the country, ended in the crisis of 1966 just to start again after the war through the reintegration of the Igbo into society. Instead of being the “culmination of Igbo ethnic formation,” the Biafran War served as a negation of the Igbo identity (*Ibid.*, 126). Comparably, Achebe reminisces about a time of great natural and human resources in Nigeria for himself and for people who were born before Nigeria’s independence in 1960, a time Nigeria was thought to be “a great land of hope and progress” but, he continues, “the Biafran War changed the hopeful and promising trajectory of the Nigerian history” (2012: 181). He goes further and claims that the war is “a cataclysmic experience that changed the history of Africa” (*Ibid.*). Considering the educated, competitive and economically superior position of the Igbo in comparison with the other ethnicities of Nigeria, it is no surprise that many writers such as Achebe regard the Biafran War as a turning point in their perception of themselves and their sense of belonging to a larger community with whom they share a common colonial and postcolonial history. Haunted by the violent execution of so many people over discriminatory ethnic politics that has been fed by the former colonial powers and international business interests, the Biafran War lingers in the national consciousness of Nigerians as a constant reminder of what people can do to one another in the name of difference and material competition. Still having the traces of the past conflicts to this day, Nigeria has been subjected to the ebb and flow of a no longer colonized, yet ethnically conflicted postcolonial country that needs to face and solve its entangled past.

1.2. Liminality and the Guilty Rebel: Female Subjectivity against Sociocultural and Political Constructs

At the backdrop of this social, political and cultural tension that led to the Biafran War and shaped the Igbo identity, *Yellow Sun* explores the physical, psychological and emotional scars of the war through Olanna’s madness in a critical stance against the historical reality of the country on various levels. In a discussion about literary representation of black female madness and its implications, Caroline A. Brown regards fictionalized mental illness as a resonant metaphor for the

disruption caused by oppression and by alienation not only from the larger structures of society but also from the very self (2017: 8). The madness *Yellow Sun* delineates goes on a similar route by way of its representation of psychopathology as an individual experience that starts and ends within, in opposition to the common evaluation of mental disorder as an extrinsic and forced phenomenon resulting from externally inflicted pain and anguish. Thanks to the three different narratives applied in the novel, Olanna, as the madwoman of the Biafran War, is reflected both through her own self-perception and through Ugwu with the specificity of a lower-class Igbo male and Richard with his white male status. The multi-layered structure of the narrative enables readers to examine and question both the social contradictions surrounding the black female subjectivity and the inner conflicts within this subjectivity concerning ethnicity, class and gender. Through these inner and outer conflicts, the novel employs Olanna's pre-war and war trauma along with her concomitant madness as a trajectory toward constructive change that foregrounds inherent meaning within the self. In this light, the madwoman's journey of the line of flight—which carries the potentiality of transformation in itself—is first and foremost preceded and shaped by the pre-war monoliths of Nigerian society and the alienated status of the madwoman within different layers of postcolonial femininity. This, in turn, necessitates a close examination of the dynamics of the pre-war period and the ways it is linked to the psychological and physical breakdown for the black madwoman.

Even though the female madness portrayed in the novel is intrinsic and goes beyond one-dimensional relations of cause-and-effect between the individual and society, Olanna's experience is contextualized within the highly segmented nature of the postcolonial Nigeria, and it is further perpetuated by the black madwoman's inability to fit within the socially accepted definitions of postcoloniality and femininity. The novel depicts this liminality through distinctive locations that in their entirety excavate a world of highly segmented classificatory groups. Olanna is first introduced in Nsukka, where the Nsukka University—the first indigenous university of post-independence Nigeria—nourishes many African scholars with exclusive commitments to tribalism, Pan-Africanism and socialism. The novel positions Olanna at her lover Odenigbo's social circle, members of which hold evening

gatherings where intellectuals of different backgrounds discuss national and international political affairs. Here, Nsukka intellectuals display ideological identifications with various constructions of Africanness that are dichotomized against whiteness. Odenigbo's Yoruba colleague, Miss Adebayo, for example, believes in Pan-Africanism, suggesting that all black people come from Africa whereas Odenigbo himself sticks to tribalism as he states:

I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came (*YS*, 20).⁴

Odenigbo's perception of blackness—a reality for the black madwoman—is downplayed to a white construction, and likewise, Igboness is glorified as an authentic marker of identity. Despite the open, democratic environment of Nsukka where everyone can discuss and share their ideas, Africanness, or in some cases Igboness is highly valued against the backdrop of a new sense of freedom from the British colonial powers in the early 60s. Within this ethnicity-oriented, intellectualized atmosphere, Olanna is introduced to be a newcomer from London where she has just received her master's degree in sociology. Unlike other scholars with an anti-European commitment, Olanna turns out to be exceptionally 'European'. A shocked Ugwu observes: "Master's English was music, but what Ugwu was hearing now, from this woman, was magic. Here was a superior tongue, a luminous language, the kind of English he heard on Master's radio, rolling out with clipped precision" (*Ibid.*, 22). Ironically, her perfect English accent does not put Olanna at the other side of the binary; the novel defies simple categorizations of postcolonial femininity. Adichie constructs a liminal black femininity against the dualistic paradigms of Europeanness and Africanness. Contrary to the stereotypical

⁴ Ironically, Odenigbo's claim over his Igbo identity as exclusively outside of European influence contradicts with the arguments of some scholars. Harneit-Sievers, for instance, argues that there was no Igbo ethnic identity in precolonial Igboland. The word Igbo was not considered to be a self-designator and was associated more with slave trade owners till the second half of the nineteenth century where people started to use it in order to refer to the communities living in the Southeast Nigeria (2006: 113). Odenigbo's strong adherence to his Igbo identity for an anchor of non-Europeanness comes off as a constructed molar segmentation that will be discussed later in the chapter.

Europeanized African with a white mask, to borrow Fanon's words, Olanna does not devalue her own race, ethnicity or language, which receives conflicting reactions from more exclusive black subjectivities according to whom clear-cut distinctions of loyalty and belonging are required. Ugwu, as part of the traditional Nigerian collective, is irritated by Olanna's perfect Igbo, for it prevents him from excluding Olanna as a European or including her as an Igbo like himself: "He wished she would stumble in her Igbo; he had not expected English that perfect to sit beside equally perfect Igbo" (*Ibid.*, 22). The perfection of one side is not negated by the other. The narratorial emphasis of Olanna's in-betweenness among Nsukka intellectuals is brought into view also within the narrator order as Ugwu's above-mentioned observation is posited in the first chapter of the novel which focalizes Ugwu. By introducing Olanna through the eyes of the economically and educationally inferior houseboy, who observes both the solely African-oriented intellectuals and the culturally alienated Olanna from a marginalized stand, the narrative foregrounds the multi-layered nature of Olanna's estrangement both in the privileged and ordinary circles of her community.

The novel strengthens Olanna's outsider position with the psychological discord between intellectual and physical affiliations, that is, her Western-based education and her fairy-like African looks. She is regarded as extremely beautiful throughout the novel. Miss Adebayo calls her 'illogically pretty' and Okeoma—the poet and friend of Odenigbo whom he regards as 'the voice of our generation'—calls her a water mermaid due to her beauty.⁵ Despite her European background and lifestyle, her body is constantly described as fleshy and curvy, "a body Susan [a Western expatriate] would call African" (*Ibid.*, 56). The imagery of the mermaid—a graceful but also mythical being of the sea—her 'illogical' beauty and her

⁵ In her analysis of Olanna, Seretha D. Williams associates Olanna's mermaid imagery with the West African water spirit Mami Wata, who is barren but cures other women's infertility, which can be a reference to Olanna's barrenness (2017: 156). This image, it can be argued, is further strengthened in the novel when Olanna delivers Ugwu the good news of the potential recovery of his mother and is described as "a shapely spirit who had emerged from the sea" (*YS*, 86) since Mami Wata is also known for her positive effect on physical and psychological ailments (Drewal, 2008: 75). Interestingly, it is argued that Mami Wata is brought by white men (*Ibid.*). The connection between Olanna and Mami Wata, thus, might also be helpful in understanding Olanna's Western education and her constant fear of being judged by her fellow Nigerians.

Africanized body in opposition to her perfect accent take Olanna out of the accepted norms of daily existence. Adichie, in a way, turns her into a dreamy, otherworldly figure with no single category:

She looked like she was not supposed to be walking and talking like everyone else; she should be in a glass case like the one in Master's study, where people could admire her curvy, fleshy body, where she would be preserved untainted (*Ibid.*, 23).

Since Olanna's dreamy and otherworldly image is created in the chapters that specifically focalize Ugwu and Richard, and not Olanna herself, the multiple focal points of the narrative create a contrast between Olanna's marginalized feminine position and the ways in which this marginal femininity is perpetually refuted to be the norm by different groups of Nigerian society as well as the European expatriates.

Yellow Sun reveals a new and contradictory layer of Olanna's experience as a female outsider through the narrative focalization shift from Ugwu to Olanna. Adichie turns the portrayal of the mysterious, uncategorizable and well-educated woman into a feminized discourse of insecurities, doubts, conflicts and fears. These insecurities are foregrounded by Olanna's inner world that exposes constant comparison to other black subjectivities such as Odenigbo and Miss Adebayo, who both have very strong political opinions about their African identity, the former as a tribalist, the latter as a pan-Africanist. Since Olanna lacks the certainty and security of the two, the narrative reveals her insecurities in her attempt to please Miss Adebayo with her political opinions, which she fears to be unoriginal. She feels judged by Miss Adebayo "with her unintellectual ways and her too-pretty face and her mimicking-the-oppressor English accent" (*Ibid.*, 48). Emphasizing Olanna's internalization of postcolonial normalcy, Adichie repeatedly contrasts the madwoman's subjectivity with that of other Nigerian men and women. Therefore, Nsukka, with its intellectual and Africanist community, serves as a source of estrangement for the madwoman who is a little too beautiful, a little too European and a little too insecure, all of which construct a feminized liminality that exists outside the ethnic, cultural and gendered discourses of normalcy. Adichie delineates a social system wherein some speak Igbo with traces of English and some speak

English as if they are speaking Igbo,⁶ and wherein beauty is positioned against intellectualism, which in turn necessitates strong political views. By doing so, Adichie renders Olanna uncategorizable; she stays outside classifications. With regard to such in-betweenness, Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, propound that “The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo” (2005: 277). In parallel, the novel positions Olanna in-between. However, the segmented inner conflicts portrayed in Olanna’s consciousness do not lead to the transformative power that the passing between brings about. Regarding dichotomous structures of identity formed by society or the individual, Deleuze and Guattari also repudiate the dichotomous combinations of two distinct groups such as bisexuality which brings two sexes together but still acknowledges them as dualistic entities. Likewise, Adichie brings seemingly opposing elements of ethnicity, culture and gender together, yet the black female subjectivity depicted in Olanna’s precarious consciousness is not free from the dichotomous connotations these elements indicate, which makes her in-betweenness an entrapment rather than an initiation of a transformative awakening.

The liminal experience inherent in the representation of Olanna’s madness in the novel is substantiated by another monolithic setting in Nigeria. Underlining the connection between alienation and liminality, Deleuze and Guattari state, “You don’t deviate from the majority unless there is a little detail that starts to swell and carries you off” (2005: 292). In a similar vein, the narrative reveals Olanna’s deviation from society, despite her undeniable desire to be a part of it, through the exclusive structure of her family environment. The novel employs the concept of family—in this case, Olanna’s uneducated, rich parents and her aloof, independent twin⁷ sister—

⁶ The novel occasionally hints at the correlation between the use of language and the cultural stances of various characters. Odenigbo’s Igbo is described as having English nuances, which makes it ironic, for he is more passionate about his Igbo identity than Olanna: “Master’s Igbo felt feathery in Ugwu’s ears. It was Igbo coloured by the sliding sounds of English, the Igbo of one who spoke English often” (YS, 5) and Okeoma “spoke English as if he were speaking Igbo, with the same cadences and pauses” (*Ibid.*, 22). No character in the novel is described to have the perfect balance besides Olanna.

⁷ Many scholars draw attention to Adichie’s utilization of twins. In the traditional precolonial Igbo society, twins were considered to be an abomination—a bad omen—and were either killed or rejected together with their mothers. Similar to the indirect reference to Mami Wata’s association with the white culture, twins have a colonial backstory since it was thanks to the efforts and protection of European missionaries that twins and their mothers found refuge from ultimate alienation and

as an important dimension of madwoman's estrangement from the domestic and public spheres. Unlike in the above-mentioned intellectual community of Nsukka where the beauty of the female body is positioned against postcolonial norms of intellectualism, the Lagos community, with the endless capitalist interest and self-serving parties of the new upper-class including Olanna's parents, objectifies the postcolonial female body and prioritizes European education. Whereas the novel portrays Nsukka as a cultural space of postcoloniality wherein acceptance and belonging are sustained by a sense of exclusive Africanness, Lagos is defined and shaped by Europeanization and capitalist entrepreneurship. The values of the Lagos community are thus clearly shown in the depiction of Olanna's parents, who, as the new elite of the post-independence Nigeria, are privileged by their wealth despite their lack of formal education, which they compensate by sending their twin daughters to expensive British schools, making them 'as European as possible'. Kainene, Olanna's rather cynical twin, comments on this social group as follows: "The new Nigerian upper class is a collection of illiterates who read nothing and eat food they dislike at overpriced Lebanese restaurants and have social conversations around one subject: "How's the new car behaving?" (YS, 60). Olanna's relationship with her parents is shaped by their self-interest and the hierarchical set of values by which the construction of upper-class normalcy is manifested. Chief Ozobia, Olanna's father, does not hesitate to offer Olanna to the finance minister in exchange for a business contract, which reveals his patriarchal privilege over his daughter. Whereas Kainene, the 'ugly' daughter, navigates the business like a son, Olanna's beauty is seen as a means to gain status. Not only does Adichie reveal the objectification of the female body in post-independence Nigeria but also underscores the exclusive gender categorizations through the different social positions of Olanna and Kainene whose specific qualifications address distinct parts of the accepted social system. The narrative further emphasizes the patriarchal values of the upper-class in the scene the financial minister grabs Olanna: "She was used to this, being grabbed by men who walked around in a cloud of cologne-drenched entitlement,

rejection (Harneit-Sievers, 2006: 104). In a way, Olanna's very existence and survival might be attributed to the colonial past, which the novel invariably refuses to idealize or demonize.

with the presumption that, because they were powerful and found her beautiful, they belonged together” (*Ibid.*, 32). Due to this highly segmented perception of gender roles in the Lagos community, the narrative portrays Olanna as perpetually manipulated and minimized to her physical value by ‘powerful’ agents of patriarchy.

The narrative, however, attributes the patriarchal and dichotomous structure of Lagos not only to men but also to women themselves. Olanna’s mother attempts to lure her into affairs that are promising for their social mobility. Chief Okonji’s gift of European laces serves as an important element in the desirability of the opposite gender. In conjunction with the obnoxious state of the postcolonial feminine space, Nigerian author and feminist Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie examines the condition of the woman among the elites of the third world countries: “The woman is the dependant of the dependant, being pulled along in the whirligig of neo-colonial meaningless behavior” (1993: 136). What is more, “Like her male counterparts, she imitates everything European and despises her traditional culture and race while she fails to understand her own true needs” (*Ibid.*). Correspondingly, the novel portrays Olanna’s mother as devoid of any Nigerian sentiment. Not having breastfed her daughters in order to keep her beauty, disapproving Olanna’s previous relationships with a Hausa man, Mohammad, and soon after, with Odenigbo, a revolutionary socialist, Olanna’s mother manifests the behaviorism of a third world woman who prioritizes privilege and social status over traditional definitions of Igbo femininity. The distinct values of the mother and daughter indicate conflicting interpretations of postcolonial black womanhood. Adichie foregrounds this familial conflict by way of exceptional moments in Olanna’s life that hint at her resistance against the Europe-oriented creation of the new upper-class Igboness. These clashing points of the narrative include Olanna’s warning to her British teacher that the lessons on Pax Britannica are contradictory, or her attendance to the Students’ Movement for Independence. By portraying Olanna’s parents as Europe-oriented and prestige-loving agents of post-independence who prioritize their own interests over the unprivileged masses, the narrative reflects the madwoman as torn between her desire to rebel against the dichotomous values of the new elite and her need for a sense of belonging. Like the Nsukka community, Olanna’s parents and the materialistic social system around them contribute to her further estrangement. Ironically, even though Olanna, with her

political protests, her egalitarianism and her balanced attitude toward cultures, creates a strong and self-sufficient image, the novel complicates her rebellion through her persistent yearning for conformity and need for security: “Still, each time, the disapproval made her want to apologize, to make up for it in some way” (YS, 33). The dilemma between the female’s desire for authenticity and likeability is analyzed by Adichie herself within the context of a more ubiquitous experience of socially inculcated Nigerian female. In a letter to a friend who asks for her advice about how to raise her baby girl, she underlines the importance of rejecting likeability as a female: “Her job is not to make herself likeable, her job is to be her full self” (2017: 18). The narrative portrays Olanna not as someone who exerts her full self but who tries to be liked by others. This attachment to the social norms of acceptability burdens the madwoman with feelings of guilt and at times unworthiness, both of which contribute to isolate her already liminal position within the already-segmented collective in the novel. This continual conflict is emphasized by the shifting focal point of the narrative. Despite the use of the third person narration that maintains the distance between the reader and the character, Ugwu’s observations of Nsukka circle where Olanna seems European and privileged conflicts with Olanna’s concomitant narrative which mirrors her outsider position among the Europe-oriented circle of Lagos. By creating this contrast within the narrative structure, Adichie constitutes layers of contradictions for the dichotomy defying female subject.

The clash between the madwoman’s liminal space and the hierarchical divisions of her society can be analyzed through Deleuze and Guattari’s commentary over the dynamics of human relations, different social aggregates and the ways these relations and aggregates are inextricably connected to one another. Deleuze and Guattari define all human beings—as individuals and collectives—as segmented: “We are segmented from all around and in every direction. The human being is a segmentary animal. Segmentarity is inherent to all the strata composing us. Dwelling, getting around, working, playing: life is spatially and socially segmented” (2005: 208). These segments are considered to be part of the ‘lines’ examined in the Introduction. According to Deleuze and Guattari, all individuals and aggregates—in this case, the madwoman and the incarcerating social constructions defining her

femininity—are composed of lines, which differ among themselves and function differently but always do so in connection with one another. The first line, rigid segmentarity or the molar line, is a key concept in understanding the madwoman's ambiguous stance toward the collective consciousness of normalcy since it defines most of the “calculable” and “foreseen” aspects of humans and human relationships. Molar lines might be binary, circular or linear, but they always necessitate a clear-cut beginning and an end. Even though the concept of rigid segmentarity as a Deleuzoguattarian argument is commonly employed to shed light on the working mechanism of states, institutions and classes, in other words, in macropolitics, their application to human relationships and to the process of identity construction—despite Deleuze and Guattari's constant emphasis and inclusion of human interactions in their discussion of the lines—remains relatively uncommon. Portraying a dichotomous world that puts the madwoman in-between, *Yellow Sun* avoids the essentialization of social divisions—ethnicities, genders, or cultures—as wholly negative or bad, and therefore, defies the romanticized representation of a complete rejection of the collective construction of Igboness, femininity and postcoloniality. This interlocking depiction of the self (the madwoman) and the Other (her society) echoes Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the lines, the interconnectedness of which requires a more complicated reading than the sole application of the dualistic paradigms.

Within this Deleuzoguattarian framework, the novel diversifies and complicates Olanna's experience of molar segments through her liminal position in society. Olanna, as expected from any individual, harbors molar lines. She is an Igbo, a woman, a daughter, a sister and a teacher. Contrary to the common portrayal of the rebellious madwoman who experiences the socially imposed and static identities as distinctively detrimental to the feminine psyche, the narrative does not depict the molar segments of Olanna's identity in a binary construct that equals static identity to limitation and its dissolution to authentic freedom. In like manner, Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly emphasize the need to refrain from regarding the rigid segmentarity as a ‘bad’ line, “for you find it everywhere, and in all the other lines” (*Ibid.*, 195). The novel delineates an ambiguous position for the madwoman: it neither rejects the segments of Olanna's identity, nor depicts her subjectivity as

dependent exclusively on a certain segment. The narrative employs Olanna as the observer of the post-independence Nigerian society, through whom it reveals the limitations and contradictions of the rigid segmentarities permeating the society in question. The multi-directional construction of Olanna's identity is too complex to be enveloped by one segment of a race, of ethnicity, of a gender or a class. This brings into surface the perspective of the rhizome and the tree in Deleuzoguattarian conceptualization with regard to the construction of identity as static or dynamic:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and. . . and. . .and. . ." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." [emphasis in the original] (*Ibid.*, 25).

The narrative refuses to place Olanna within the arborescent structures. Even though she yearns for the attainment of "to be," which is shown in her endless insecurities and fears, she functions rhizomatically, without filiations and a single root by which her subjectivity is defined and restricted. Unlike the other characters in the novel who are engaged by the limitations of their arborescent values, Olanna speaks perfect English *and* perfect Igbo; she is intellectual *and* pretty; she is from the elite *and* a socialist. The concurrent contrast between arborescent/rhizomatic structures of identity, specifically depicted through Olanna, sheds light on the interrelatedness between heterogeneity of identities and the normative classifications of madness and sanity.

Yellow Sun reveals the ambiguous nature of the madwoman's dilemma concerning the need to be a part of a segment and to be free of all segments through Olanna's rhizomatic relationship with Odenigbo at the backdrop of arborescent social values. Their relationship is not portrayed hierarchical or gender-based. Yet, the novel contrasts the unconventionality of such a relationship between an Igbo man and woman with the more traditional and patriarchal views of the collective consciousness. Ugwu, for example, observes, "It was as if Master would stick his head in a raging fire if Olanna asked him to. It was as if she had become the master" (*YS*, 81). Moreover, Adichie repeatedly depicts Olanna as initiative as, if not more than, Odenigbo in their sexual intercourse, which is experienced on a mutual basis:

“She was moaning loudly, sounds that seemed so unlike her, so uncontrolled and stirring and throaty” (*Ibid.*, 24). This unconventionality is further strengthened by the lack of institutionalization, for Adichie underlines Olanna’s avoidance of marriage: “They were too happy, precariously so, and she wanted to guard that bond; she feared that marriage would flatten it to a prosaic partnership” (*Ibid.*, 49). Given that marriage holds a crucial meaning in the Igbo community especially for the social standing of the female, Olanna’s refusal to institutionalize their bond for fear of turning it into an arborescent relationship transcends the boundaries of communal acceptability.⁸ The portrayal of the madwoman as sexually active and devoid of marital attachments, therefore, evokes a new sense of Igbo femininity.

As the conventional gender roles indicate a dichotomy between the male and female, which is represented by the Tree, the liminal black femininity in the novel manifests a rhizomatic direction toward the re-creation of gender dynamics. In this light, Deleuze and Guattari argue: “Once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborified, it’s all over, no desire stirs; for it is always by rhizome that desire moves and produces. Whenever desire climbs a tree, internal repercussions trip it up and it falls to its death” (2005: 14). Olanna’s rejection of marriage creates a more dynamic, flexible and rhizomatic segment of desire. Against the expectations of her family, colleagues and the rest of the society, the narrative exposes Olanna’s bond with Odenigbo—where she can be outside of norms but still be validated—as a shelter. Even if she incessantly worries about their relationship, which comes naturally with lack of institutionalization, Olanna perceives her life with Odenigbo in Nsukka as “being immersed in a mesh of soft feathers” (*YS*, 49). Similar to the gap between how Olanna is perceived by others and how she perceives herself, the contrast between the unconventionality of her relationship with Odenigbo and how it is seen by others is shown through Ugwu’s above-mentioned unease about Olanna’s

⁸ In *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, Nigerian anthropologist and poet Ifi Amadiume analyzes the way Igbo society is centered around marriage and childbirth. She recites a song women sang in the palm wine ceremony of a couple who is about to be married, which mirrors the dominant gender ideology of the traditional community:

Be you as beautiful as a mermaid, the beauty of a woman is to have a husband.

Be you one who has been to the land of white people, the beauty of a woman is to have a husband.

If a woman does not marry, her beauty declines. One who is beautiful is best to be in her husband’s house (1987: 90).

assertiveness and her treatment of the relationship as a shelter. Thanks to the shifting focalization of the narrative, the novel underscores the vulnerability of the liminal black subjectivity within the larger patriarchal context and attributes madness, among other facets of societal restrictions, to the unacceptability of the unconventional gender roles.

The novel posits the heterogeneous black female subjectivity in a zone of alienation within the social unrest among the different classes of the postcolonial state. By revealing the incongruity of classes from a feminized perspective, Adichie turns gendered madness into a disruptive textual space upon which the feminization of social problems and the problematization of postcolonial femininity are interlocked and manifested. The narrative contrasts Olanna's insecure yet independent subjectivity with the static identity of Odenigbo's mother, who is extremely traditional and arborescent in her views. Discussing the dangers of each line, Deleuze and Guattari warn about the fear of losing one's security and one's need to cling to the comfort that comes with the molar line. Olanna, too, has a sense of self that feeds from certain aspects of her identity such as being a well-educated, independent woman who does not conform to socially expected roles including wifehood and motherhood. Even though the liminal femininity is imbued with self-doubt and insecurities, *Yellow Sun* portrays Olanna as a potentially strong female figure who has a privileged position in the Nigerian social system. However, Adichie employs Mama's presence to disrupt this privilege and to reveal the gender politics of the newly independent state. The values represented by Odenigbo and Olanna as intellectuals with high ideals are contrasted with the patriarchal doctrines of the majority of the country through Mama's treatment and severe reaction to Olanna. One by one, Adichie, utilizing Mama as the voice of the traditional woman with a monolithic understanding of culture and femininity, touches on all the 'abnormalities' inherent in the black madwoman regarding the societal criteria of normalcy. Refusing Olanna as her son's partner, Mama attacks her privileged status, questioning her parents' domestic, economic and cultural 'deficiencies':

No wonder my son has not married while his mates are counting how many children they have. She has used her witchcraft to hold him. I heard her father came from a family of lazy beggars in Umunnachi until he got a job as a tax

collector and stole from hard-working people. Now he has opened many businesses and is walking around in Lagos and answering a Big Man. Her mother is no better. What woman brings another person to breastfeed her own children when she herself is alive and well? (YS, 92)

Since Olanna's idealism is challenged by the homogeneous conceptualizations of tradition, femininity and Igboness, the novel renders her subjectivity ambiguous by switching from the beautiful mermaid imagery to the malicious witch. Quoting Jean and John Comaroff, Harneit-Sievers draws attention to the commonality of witchcraft accusations in during the postcolonial crisis as a form of "expression of social and intracommunal discontent and conflict in Africa, far from being just remnants of "traditional" belief systems"⁹ (2006: 146). Consequently, the unrest between the two women indicates not only a disagreement between a potential bride and her traditional mother-in-law but also the larger clash of classes and differences in cultural-orientation. Through the transition from the mermaid imagery to the witch, the novel discloses the political unrest and the rejection of the complex, independent woman within the more traditional community including both sexes.

Yellow Sun unfolds the multi-layered structure of patriarchy and its inculcation of the masses by way of the contrast between the outsider female and the traditional Igbo woman. Contextualizing the madwoman's subjectivity within more traditional female subjectivities, the novel underscores the societal limitations and the constant demand for clear-cut definitions of femininity. That is to say, Olanna's psychic demise is triggered by the exclusive definitions of postcolonial Igbo femininity. The novel utilizes Mama, a participant of patriarchal values, to reflect the inculcated female consciousness shaped by the idea of the superiority of men. As men are traditionally supposed to be the head of the family, the gender exceptionalism turns the education of women—a tool for self-sufficiency—into a threat—destructive both to the woman herself and to the larger community¹⁰: "Too

⁹ Harneit-Sievers also states that usually the accusations are aimed at wealthier members of the community (2006: 146). This explains the mention of Olanna's parents right after the witchcraft accusations, as they belong to the uneducated new elite whose source of wealth might arouse suspicion.

¹⁰ On a similar note, analyzing Igbo culture, Amadiume states that "the general feeling among the males and even the females is that marrying such a[n] [educated] girl will be tantamount to bringing

much schooling ruins a woman; everyone knows that. It gives a woman a big head and she will start to insult her husband. What kind of wife will that be?” (YS, 93). Mama, revealing a hierarchical gender politics, equates ‘true’ femininity with subordination. Therefore, inferiority to a man is considered to be the norm whereas inferiority to an educated woman like Olanna disrupts the social order. In her analysis of women’s inhumanity to one another, psychotherapist and author Phyllis Chesler regards it as inevitable or at least expected for a female to internalize the values that leave her inferior and helpless since women live in the same misogynistic community that produces those dichotomous values (2009: 2). Quoting Cowan, Chesler also asserts that “women who are hostile toward other women don’t feel good about themselves. They have lower personal self-esteem, optimism, sense of self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and higher objectified body consciousness compared to women who are not hostile toward women”¹¹ (*Ibid.*, 4). That being so, Mama’s harsh reaction to Olanna’s presence tells as much about the traditional female as the rebellious, intellectual female subject. Olanna’s safe world with Odenigbo, which is beyond the judgement of the outside world and social norms, and Mama’s comfort zone within the traditional expectations are equally brought into question. The novel utilizes the encounter between two opposing representations of Igbo femininity as a means to reflect the fractured state of society both within and out of same gender relations.

The inclusion of Mama’s presence in the storyline disrupts the creative potential of Olanna’s liminality within the narrative structure. Mama’s sudden appearance takes the seemingly rhizomatic direction of Olanna’s narrative to an arborescent framework. Since the arborescent system “is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centered or segmented higher unity” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 16), it cracks up the safety the novel initially offers to Olanna through her

“another man” into the family - a situation which will seriously jeopardize harmony in the family” (1987: 157). Mama’s criticism and judgment of Olanna goes beyond personal resentment and reveals Olanna’s alienation from the majority of society.

¹¹ Many scholars have underlined the connection between the removal of the African women from public sphere during the colonial rule as a part of the European cultural inheritance of female subjugation and the low self-esteem from which African women suffer. For more detailed analysis of women’s changed status in the colonial rule, see Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí’s *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (1997).

unconventional, highly sexual yet childless relationship with Odenigbo. The centered unity on which Mama's entire self is built revolves around patriarchal notions of sexuality, womanhood and motherhood. As Olanna does not conform to these roles, she is described as a 'loose' and an 'abnormal' woman. Adichie employs Mama's outbursts to reflect the connection between women's education and the common notions of promiscuity: "These girls that go to university follow men around until their bodies are useless. Nobody knows if she [Olanna] can have children. Do you know? Does anyone know?" (YS, 93). By portraying Olanna as a well-educated, sexually active but childless woman, the novel uncovers the hidden dimensions of Olanna's upcoming madness in a world that forces women to have roots instead of a flowing rhizome. The roles Olanna refuses to take part in—wifedom and motherhood—form the basis of her society. Nigerian linguist and poet Michael C. Mbabu argues that in Igbo community, which is very children-oriented, an individual without any offspring is considered to be the 'missing link' because they do not contribute to the reproduction process of the community (1996: 60). In addition, critics Dimka and Dein draw attention to the communal basis of the problem: "The salience of kinship and other social structural and cultural factors in shaping West African fertility values and behaviours translates thus: in a world of epidemic poverty, biological reproduction is precedent to economic reproduction" (2013: 104). Even though any individual, male or female, is considered to be a failure without children to preserve their posterity, the woman is more stigmatized in the community. A childless woman, together with an unmarried woman, a spinster or a divorcee, is considered to be a "monstrosity" and an "unclaimed" and "degenerating commodity" to be exploited by men (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994: 77). Having no marital status and children, Olanna is not exempted from the inferior position of these women. By emphasizing Olanna's mental state and liminality within this context, Adichie indicates that despite their seemingly independent stance, educated women are not free from communal judgment and the pressure of motherhood.

The novel intermingles different facets of female liminality through the use of multiple focalizers which invariably connects seemingly unrelated dimensions of gendered madness. Since childless women are stigmatized and ostracized, the

women who are crowned with motherhood hold a certain degree of power in postcolonial Nigeria.¹² Similarly, the novel portrays a world where maternity supersedes intellectualism and independence. Adichie complicates gender and class dynamics by Mama's exploitation of an uneducated girl from her village to have a grandson, thus positioning Amala—the uneducated, submissive village girl whose presence is encumbered by textual silence—superior to Olanna. As mentioned above, the arborescent system relies completely on a segmented unity, which, in this case, is patriarchy that is inculcated by the collective in order to keep the hierarchical segments of social strata intact. Mama's cruel treatment to Olanna underlines the collective wish to stay within the arborescent system where everything seems calculable and everyone is categorizable in a dualistic paradigm. Regarding the relation between patriarchy and female bonds, Chesler underscores the hidden motive for female rivalries and argues that they do not disrupt but, on the contrary, support the status quo (2009: 37).¹³ The underlying factor for the feminized conflict is manifested overtly when Ugwu, with his superstitious beliefs and fear of magic, gets suspicious about Mama who puts a portion on Amala's back:

Perhaps Mama was rubbing a potion on Amala. But it made no sense because if Mama had indeed gone to the *dibia*, the medicine would be for Olanna and not Amala. It may be, though, that the medicine worked on women and Mama would have to protect herself and Amala to make sure that only Olanna died or became barren or went mad (YS, 202).

¹² Regarding the prestigious state of maternity in Igbo society, Amadiume points out the internal power that maternity endows women with alongside the external authority it grants to them through an Igbo song:

Nv'anyi bu isi okwu . . . bu isi okwu, OAbughi nwanyi kedu ka aga esi muta nwa Kedu ka aga esi muta nwa.

Woman is principal ... is principal. Without a woman, how can a child be born? How can a child be born? (1987: 98).

Oyèwùmí, on the other hand, accentuates the comforting role of motherhood on the relationship between women in Africa: "In this family system, unlike in the nuclear family, motherhood is the most important source and model of solidarity, and being a mother is perceived as an attractive and desirable goal to achieve" (2003: 13).

¹³ Chesler also touches on the concept of ambivalent sexism applied by psychologists Peter Click and Susan T. Fiske. According to the two, women who are hostile to other women have the tendency to have positive feelings for the conventional women who know their place and act accordingly, which in turn perpetuates further gender inequality (2009: 136-7). This explains Mama's relatively positive attitude toward Amala who always acts 'properly' and never goes out of line.

In the clear-cut categories of what is accepted and what is not, the narrative spotlights the perception of a barren female and a madwoman in society, both of which are only equal to death. As the event takes place in Ugwu's chapter, the multiple narrative structure of the novel underscores both Ugwu's association of these three marginalized states to one another and Mama's patriarchal stance toward liminal femininity, thereby incorporating the monolithic male and female narratives into Olanna's own liminal storyline. Through the narration of Mama's misogynistic attempts in a male-focalized chapter, the novel sheds light on the interdependence between male and female subjects in the creation of dichotomous patriarchal values. What is more, in the scene where Mama puts the portion on Amala's back and initiates Odenigbo's infidelity, Olanna's barrenness and her madness, not yet known to the reader, are intertwined.

As will be examined in the following chapters, the novel connects body politics with psychological estrangement that is part and parcel of black women's mad writing. The black female body, both a means of alienation and re-integration, is depicted to be a complex dimension of gendered madness, upon which the madwoman's liminality and the homogeneous conceptualizations of motherhood and femininity are inscribed. Positioned outside the discourse of normalcy, Olanna's narrative shifts from defiance to insecurity: "Odenigbo's mother's visit had ripped a hole in her safe mesh of feathers, startled her, snatched something away from her. She felt one step away from where she should be" (*Ibid.*, 98). The novel coincides Olanna's encounter with Mama, who exerts the traditional impositions of fertility, with Olanna's sudden desire to have a baby. Correspondingly, in their analysis of the molar line, Deleuze and Guattari explain the incessant fear of losing one's security and one's yearning for rigid segmentarity: "We flee from flight, rigidify our segments, give ourselves over to binary logic; the harder they have been to us on one segment, the harder we will be on another" (2005: 227). *Yellow Sun* follows a similar route by exploring the possibility of the madwoman's integration into the norms of social acceptability. Olanna, despite her avoidance of marriage, retreats into the molar line and rigidifies herself on motherhood. However, Adichie's construction of the barren female body leaves no room for rigidification of the madwoman. Without a rigid segmentarity, Olanna is rendered vulnerable—a prey for stigmatization.

Excluded from the arborescent thought and action, Olanna's barren body perpetuates her inability to stay within the dichotomous structures of molar segments and triggers her impending mental breakdown.

In parallel with the heterogeneous conceptualizations of identity in the novel, Adichie foregrounds the interconnectedness between different facets of oppression as well as the clear-cut distinction between madness and sanity. Even though Olanna's madness occurs only after the political upheaval of the anti-Igbo pogroms, which creates an opportunity for her to experience what Deleuze and Guattari call 'the line of flight', her experience is not portrayed as a sudden shift from sanity to insanity. On a similar note, Deleuze and Guattari highlight the necessity of the molecular line, or the supple segmentarity, before one switches to the line of flight: "It is odd how supple segmentarity is caught between the two other lines, ready to tip to one side or the other; such is its ambiguity" (2005: 205). In this light, the molecular line is like "a quanta of deterritorialization" (*Ibid.*). Likewise, Adichie posits Olanna—between her alienation from society and her experience of madness—in a transitional stage where her naive idealism¹⁴ is challenged. Within a phase of molecular realization, the novel strips the madwoman off her safe 'territory' and urges her subjectivity to be deterritorialized. Thanks to the multiple focal points of the narrative, before Olanna comes to the realization of the end of her dreamy world with Odenigbo, the novel situates Olanna in her family environment where Adichie constructs a similar representation of gender politics through Olanna's father's extramarital affair with another woman. Utilizing the out-of-the-ordinary nature of betrayal, the novel takes Olanna's subjectivity out of the well-defined molar categories and reshapes it through 'a molecular perception':

She looked around his room and thought how unfamiliar his large bed was; she had never seen that lustrous shade of gold on a blanket before or noticed how intricately convoluted the metal handles of his chest of drawers were. He even looked like a stranger, a fat man she didn't know (YS, 206).

¹⁴ Initially in the novel, Olanna is portrayed as an idealist regarding many aspects of social, cultural and political structures such as egalitarianism, socialism and the rejection of ethnic or gender discrimination. In one of his first encounters with Olanna, Richard underlines this quality: "He was charmed by that quality of hers that seemed both sophisticated and naive, an idealism that refused to be suffocated by gritty reality" (YS, 61).

The defamiliarization of Olanna's father and the materialistic values that the new perception brings to light intertwine domestic and economic power structures with one another. Adichie syncs Olanna's encounter with her father in a new light and her realization of other segments of corruption in her family. The awareness of gender politics is linked to the awareness of class exploitation. She, for the first time so openly, criticizes her parents' source of income and the ethics behind their capitalist manipulations. When her mother scolds a servant who steals rice from her kitchen, Olanna claims: "My father and his politician friends steal money with their contracts, but nobody makes them kneel to beg for forgiveness" and she goes on: "And they build houses with their stolen money and rent them out to people like this man and charge inflated rents that make it impossible to buy food" (*Ibid.*, 208). As she switches from a molar perspective, where everything is clearly defined and separated, to a molecularized perception that reflects every segment in molecular size, what seems to be so separate and unrelated becomes interconnected, turning every segment into tiny but interwoven pieces. By weaving different forms of exploitation, Adichie hints at the interlocking elements of all divisions—'segments' in Deleuze and Guattari's words—and reveals the one 'rootedness' of the dichotomous social strata that creates the power relations in Nigeria.

Through revealing the internal similarities of externally opposing groups, the novel creates a disjunctive unity within the fractured narrative which has previously depicted these opposing structures in distance from one another. Each four part of the novel focuses solely either on the early 60s or the late 60s and follows a chronological order within themselves. However, what is presented in linear form to the reader is not experienced in the same order for characters since different focal points reveal different perspectives of the storyline. In Chapter Nineteen—Ugwu's perspective—Adichie exposes Odenigbo's intercourse with Amala. In the following chapter where the narrative focalizes Olanna, she learns about her father's infidelity without any awareness of Odenigbo's betrayal.¹⁵ Through the act of infidelity by two

¹⁵ Olanna's unawareness of Odenigbo's betrayal in the previous chapter and her exposure to her father's betrayal also underscore the molecular nature of her madness. By the time she learns about Odenigbo's affair, it has already been a part of her experience with her father. They are completely interwoven. Deleuze and Guattari explain the process as follows: "It is on this [molecular] line that a

seemingly very different men, the intellectual and idealistic world of Nsukka and the capitalist, Europeanized world of Lagos are brought together. The big differences depicted earlier melt into tiny pieces where “it is hard to tell who is who anymore, or what anything means” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 195). Not only does the divide between the socialist-tribalist Odenigbo and the capitalist, Europe-loving Chief Ozobia blur but also the demarcation between the personal and political. This deconstruction of exclusive categories is further emphasized by Olanna’s experience with a non-Igbo man who mistakes Olanna for a Fulani woman. Contextualizing the encounter on a plane from Kano—the key setting for the ethnic tension and later the breakout of the war—Adichie blurs the line between authenticity and ethnic differentiation. Within the context of already arising unrest of the ethnic conflicts, the man, drawn to Olanna’s beauty—supposedly a Fulani woman—makes an anti-Igbo speech. Rather than a negative experience, Adichie depicts the encounter between these two members of different genders and ethnicities as liberating in its potential to reveal the social constructedness of one’s sense of self. Everything changes once the social aggregates are uncovered and the rigid segmentarities are broken by a molecularized perception:

If only he knew that his prejudice had filled her with possibility. She did not have to be the wounded woman whose man had slept with a village girl. She could be a Fulani woman on a plane deriding Igbo people with a good-looking stranger. She could be a woman taking charge of her own life. She could be anything (YS, 214).

Aside from underlining the breakdown of gender dynamics with this realization, where Olanna frees herself from the restraints of labeling her entire being upon a single experience, the scene also stresses the constructed nature of ethnic politics, which will soon perpetuate the Biafran War. Just as Olanna is not trapped in a monolithic self-definition, the ethnic groups are not trapped in a fixed bloodline. Olanna, despite being an Igbo, can be mistaken for a Fulani woman—the so-called ‘enemy’ in the Biafran War. The novel shows that it is possible for a Fulani man to

present is defined whose very form is the form of something that has already happened, however close you might be to it, since the ungraspable matter of that something is entirely molecularized, traveling at speeds beyond the ordinary thresholds of perception” (2005: 196).

be attracted to an Igbo woman given all the baggage of the ethnic divide is stripped off; in the same way it is possible for a man to rape a woman of another ethnicity as *Yellow Sun* so realistically depicts later in the war. Olanna's encounter with the stranger on the plane takes place in Part Three, which focuses on the early 60s. Yet, the fact that Part Two is based on the late 60s makes the reader already aware of the impending war and evaluate the events of the early 60s including Olanna's encounter within the ethnic violence of the battleground. Thanks to the nonlinear structure of the four main parts of the novel that merge the early and late sixties, this interconnection becomes more apparent, for Olanna's experience on the plane is narrated after the Biafran War has already started and caused many casualties in the previous part. By positing the scene after the violence of the war is already exposed to the reader, the novel strengthens the interconnection between the personal and political—from Olanna's love anguish to the bloody experience of the ethnic war.

The molecularization of the highly segmented world *Yellow Sun* depicts goes beyond the extrinsic categories of gender, class, ethnicity and blurs the divisions within the self. Olanna's portrayal as the good daughter, lover and citizen is disrupted by her decision to sleep with Richard—her twin Kainene's white lover—in an attempt to get over Odenigbo's betrayal. Kainene's reaction underscores the contradictions between Olanna's external image and her act of betrayal: “‘You’re the good one.’ Kainene’s voice was controlled. ‘The good one shouldn’t fuck her sister’s lover’” (*Ibid.*, 242). By foregrounding the ‘good’ sister image of Olanna, the novel brings into question the roles that constitute the black female subjectivity, which is highly associated with likeability. Kainene goes on, “‘You’re the good one and the favourite and the beauty and the Africanist revolutionary who doesn’t like white men, and you simply did not need to fuck him’” (*Ibid.*). As having intercourse with Richard goes against all of her ‘good’ qualities, the novel contradicts the concept of a fixed self with one's actions, which are dynamic and forever changing. This clash highlights the illusion of the fixity of the self. In this light, Adichie offers an alternative and a more positive perspective in Olanna's experience: “It was as if she was throwing shackles off her wrists, extracting pins from her skin, freeing

herself with the loud, loud cries that burst out of her mouth” (*Ibid.*, 221). The narrative regards her selfishness as a liberating force.¹⁶ By portraying Olanna as involved with betrayal herself, the narrative destroys the intangible divide between the madwoman and the others as well as the good and the bad.¹⁷ Getting rid of her self-inflicted or socially-imposed roles, Olanna becomes, in a way, like everyone else, thereby blurs the line between the self and the other—lost in a thousand pieces of small molecules as part of the whole. Based on Olanna’s evolving position as a female outsider, the novel portrays a world of molar segmentation through clearly divided categories of ethnicity, class and gender, just to deconstruct them and crack them into tiny pieces. These pieces, in return, are solidified in the Biafran War and in Olanna’s subsequent madness.

1.3. The Creation of a Rhizomatic Self through Madness

Analyzing the psychology of war, Davoine and Gaudillière highlight the extraordinary circumstances precipitated by wars—worldwide, civil or ethnic wars—and the ways those circumstances, through the breakdown of all reference points to the pre-war norms, give rise to links outside what is considered to be normal and accepted (2004: xxii). In a similar vein, *Yellow Sun* depicts Olanna’s temporary madness in the extraordinary circumstances of the Biafran War where the peaceful and promising image of the country is substituted by a never-ending circle of violence, cruelty and bloodshed among ethnic groups that were once amalgamated under one national territory. Olanna’s madness connects the otherwise unrelated

¹⁶ Even though Olanna’s intercourse with Richard is portrayed positively with regard to her coming to terms with Odenigbo’s betrayal, it is important to note that this freedom and the ‘sense of well-being’ comes with a heavy price considering it causes the two sisters to lose contact with one another. However, from an authorial viewpoint, Olanna’s betrayal might be regarded as liberating since, by portraying Olanna in different and seemingly contradictory ways, Adichie refrains from mythifying the African woman. In their analysis of the madwoman, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar underscore the need for female authors to transcend the extreme images of women as the ‘angel’ or the ‘monster’—reminiscent of Virginia Woolf’s sentiment of “we must kill the angel in the house” (2000: 17). In a similar vein, Olanna stops being an angel and becomes a full-fledged human with her ‘good’ and ‘bad’ decisions.

¹⁷ Here, Adichie’s representation of good and bad coincides with Deleuzoguattarian view that “good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary selection, which must be renewed” (2005: 10). In both cases, an arborescent evaluation is avoided in order to prevent personal or collective identity from being trapped into one root, which cannot represent the complexity of the whole.

narratives of the novel and forms a critique of Nigerian society. Within the context of the war, where the comfort of the molar identity is disrupted, Olanna experiences what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'line of flight'. According to the Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, a society is defined by its lines of flight. There is always something that flows¹⁸ or flees the segmented structure of social aggregates (2005: 216). By positioning Olanna on a line of flight through her experience of madness, Adichie outlines the process of confrontation with what the black female subjectivity and the collective consciousness refuse to accept regarding the interconnectedness of various facets of personal and collective identity. Therefore, she turns Olanna's madness into a transformative inner journey that necessitates the reconstruction of ethnic, gender and class categories on a molecular level which is free of dichotomies.

The narrative constructs Olanna's madness as a deconstructive textual strategy that disrupts the linear discourse of history and the masculinized documentation of the war. As mentioned earlier, the novel focalizes on three characters in a fixed order of appearance in all parts: Ugwu, Olanna and Richard. Interestingly, Adichie disrupts the order in Chapter Thirteen. Since Chapter Twelve focuses on Richard, Chapter Thirteen is supposed to focalize Ugwu. Instead, the narrative skips Ugwu and switches to Olanna. By changing the 'normal' order of the narrative, Adichie underscores the abnormality of the wartime and the centrality of Olanna's madness within the story. Through her madness, Olanna's story takes the lead, flees the normality of the narrative and changes the flow of the war in order to—in Deleuze and Guattari's words—redefine society. Even though all three characters are exposed to the horrors of the war, it is only Olanna's trauma that keeps repeating over and over again and therefore, refuses the normalization of the irrationality of the war. Olanna is located in the North at the outbreak of the war, where the main conflict occurs, as opposed to Ugwu, who witnesses the violence of the war at the train station in Nsukka, the 'safe' part of the country for the Igbo, and Richard happens to be at the airport when some Northern soldiers kill every Igbo at

¹⁸ In his translator's note to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi makes a distinction between the original language of the concept of the line of flight in French and the English translation. He argues that the word *fuite* refers both to 'flight' and 'escape'. However, a line of flight has nothing to do with flying. Rather, it implies an act of fleeing, flowing and leaking (2005: xv). A line of flight, therefore, does not mean escaping from reality or from unpleasant circumstances.

the airport. As Ugwu is only exposed to the runaway Igbos who have arrived Nsukka for safety, his own life and Igbo identity are not threatened by a direct encounter with the enemy. In a similar vein, Richard witnesses the massacre of Igbos as a British citizen, from a safe space separated from the war zone that exclusively encompasses the Nigerians themselves. On the other hand, Adichie exposes Olanna to the massacre directly where she escapes death only with the help of her former Hausa boyfriend, Mohammad—by disguising herself as a Hausa woman, in other words, by giving up on her Igbo identity. Unlike Ugwu and Richard who are only exposed to the death and wounds of complete strangers, Olanna is subjected to the massacre of her family members, Aunt Ifeka, Uncle Mbaezi and her pregnant cousin Arize:

The street looked strange, unfamiliar; the compound gate was broken, the metal flattened on the ground. Then she noticed Aunt Ifeka's kiosk, or what remained of it: splinters of wood, packets of groundnuts lying in the dust. She opened the car door and climbed out. She paused for a moment because of how glaringly bright and hot it was, with flames billowing from the roof, with grit and ash floating in the air, before she began to run towards the house. She stopped when she saw the bodies. Uncle Mbaezi lay facedown in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. Something creamy-white oozed through the large gash on the back of his head. Aunt Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips (YS, 139).

Taking place in Olanna's chapter, the scene of the massacre defies the normalcy of the linear documentation of the war and centralizes Olanna's madness in the creation of a multi-dimensional representation of ethnic violence. Therefore, while the narrative situates Ugwu and Richard as the second-hand witnesses of the violence exerted on male subjects,¹⁹ it positions Olanna within both sides of the conflict and the death of both sexes, turning her trauma from a one-sided, one-gendered interpretation to a double-sided, double-gendered testimony.

The novel positions the corporeal reality of the madwoman in opposition to the desire for normalcy within the larger narrative. In *Powers of Horror*, Julia

¹⁹ Ugwu goes to the train station in Nsukka to give food to the wounded Igbo people who have escaped from the massacre of the North. He encounters a one-eyed man whereas Richard, upon his return from England, has a conversation with an Igbo worker at the airport, who in a short while is killed by Northern soldiers. Neither of them witnesses the suffering of a woman. Olanna's traumatic experience remains the only one free from a monolithic perception of the war and therefore, is centralized through the shift of the narrative order.

Kristeva suggests that excrement and its equivalents such as decay, infection, disease and corpse indicate a danger to the identity that comes from without, “the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death” (1982: 71). This abject state of excrement, disease and corpse is seen as the external indications of the fear of the outside, for infections, diseases, excrement and corpses are positioned outside the desired ‘normalcy’ recognized in the ego, society and the concept of life. In a similar manner to Kristeva, the novel plays with the man-made boundary between the normalcy of the early 60s and the abnormality of war that brings diseases and corpses to the foreground. Having faced the battleground of Kano—a place associated with ethnic harmony in the novel—Olanna cannot deal with “the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders” (*Ibid.*, 4). By the time she is back to Nsukka, she is no longer the same person. Her legs and bladder stop functioning and her mental stability is destructed by Dark Swoops: “A thick blanket descended from above and pressed itself over her face, firmly, while she struggled to breathe” and “when it let go, freeing her to take in gulp after gulp of air, she saw burning owls at the window grinning and beckoning to her with charred feathers” (YS, 148). She starts to talk mechanically and does not laugh. By constructing a corporeal manifestation of the war, the black female body—encumbered by madness—transforms into the recreation of a (feminized) history.

The feminized documentation of the war through the black female body is constructed against a discourse of silence wherein the interconnectedness of the psychological and the physical is abnegated. Despite all the physical symptoms of Olanna’s trauma—her dependence on pills, not functioning legs and bladder, the novel links Olanna’s state to a psychic demise. Yet, her trauma is surrounded by silence. When she tries to tell Odenigbo about her Dark Swoops, he says “Shush, *nkem*. You’ll be fine” (*Ibid.*, 148). Likewise, Kainene tells her she does not need to put her traumatic experience into words. When the guests, friends and relatives “came by to say *ndo*—sorry—and to shake their heads and mutter about the evils of those Muslim Hausa people, those black-as-he-goats Northerners, those dirty cattle rearers with jigger-infested feet” (*Ibid.*, 149), Olanna is portrayed as the muted listener. These dichotomous remarks only worsen her Dark Swoops. As the only person who experiences the massacre personally, she is the only silent one, and her

trauma is never validated. Through this textual silence of the massacre, Adichie blurs the line between the reality of the war and the desire for normalcy: “She wondered if she was mistaken, if she had perhaps imagined the bodies lying in the dust, so many bodies in the yard that recalling them made salt rush to her mouth” (*Ibid.*, 183). According to Davoine and Gaudillière, people who lose touch with reference points to social norms in war, or ‘mad’ people, exist in a “zone of nonexistence” and reveal what no one wants to know anything about and “what is not inscribed as past” (2004: 12). Equivalently, the massacre in Kano, the bloodshed resulting from the fear of difference and the violence enacted for ethnic authenticity are brushed aside as something to be silenced and treated as nonexistent.

Despite the politics of forgetting permeating the text, *Yellow Sun* portrays Olanna’s Dark Swoops and her physical reaction to the massacre in Kano as a counter-narrative. Her madness, a constant reminder of irrationality of the war, refuses to be left in a zone of nonexistence. Adichie integrates her traumatic experience into the rest of the narration by highlighting Olanna’s tainted psyche in supposedly pleasant moments. After her traumatic experience, Olanna and Odenigbo have intercourse, which ends with the haunting images of her pregnant cousin: “She caressed his neck, buried her fingers in his dense hair, and when he slid into her, she thought about Arize’s pregnant belly, how easily it must have broken, skin stretched that taut. She started to cry” (*Ibid.*, 151-2). Adichie contrasts this memory-loaded intercourse with another scene from the early 60s: “She did not know that a man’s thrusts could suspend memory, that it was possible to be poised in a place where she could not think or remember, but only feel” (*Ibid.*, 28). The comfort of intimacy is replaced by a new consciousness of the world, in which the gender dynamics is reshaped and the glorification of ethnic solidarity is defied. The novel manifests this shift in a rally scene for the Biafran secession, where everyone is hopeful for their new country whereas Olanna sees the rally through the eyes with which she has witnessed the massacre:

Odenigbo raised his arm as he spoke, and Olanna thought how awkwardly twisted Aunt Ifeka’s arm had looked, as she lay on the ground, how her blood had pooled so thick that it looked like glue, not red but close to black. Perhaps Aunt Ifeka could see this rally now, and all the people here, or perhaps not, if death was a silent opaqueness (*Ibid.*, 154).

Through the constant recapitulation of the Kano scene—with her family being killed—Olanna’s madness brings what is in the zone of nonexistence into existence. Within Olanna’s haunted psyche and the violence of the war, the novel offers a double vision of the Biafran conflict and brings forth what is ignored by majority into foreground.

The portrayal of gendered madness functions as a bridge between the different time zones in the novel and reframes pre-war and war narratives. As mentioned earlier, *Yellow Sun* does not follow a chronological order in its storyline. Rather, it is comprised of four different parts, with Part One and Three covering the early 1960s and Part Two and Four covering the late 1960s, which equals the Biafran secession and subsequently, the war. Aside from resisting the zone of nonexistence, Olanna’s madness connects the early and late 1960s together, as her perception of the Biafran secession and the war is haunted by the murder of her relatives who live happily in the early 1960s. Her haunted psyche perpetually brings the early 60s into the chaos of the late 60s. It is crucial to contextualize the zone of Olanna’s trauma, for it reveals the gap between Nigeria’s aspirations of unity and its contrasting reality. As opposed to Nsukka and Lagos, Kano plays an important role in the representation of the ethnically diverse Nigeria in the early 1960s. The socialist and Africanist atmosphere of Nsukka and the greedy capitalism and Europeanization of Lagos are negated in Kano. Here, the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo live together in harmony. Unlike Olanna who speaks English, French and Latin, her uncle, aunt and cousin speak Hausa and Yoruba. Due to the migration of the Igbos to the North to escape overpopulation in the South and to benefit from job opportunities in the North, Kano is a place that reflects the ethnic diversity of the country. Unlike Lagos and Nsukka, where people are either the rich elite or the intellectuals, Kano is an ordinary place with ordinary people. Thanks to its simplicity, its lack of luxury and intense overvaluation of the academia, it is portrayed as an idyllic alternative to Nsukka and Lagos. According to Olanna, Kano is filled with “lucid peace” (*Ibid.*, 37) and “if there was a place she could think clearly, it was Kano” (*Ibid.*, 212). What makes Kano a subversive textual space is, however, the alternative family structure

that the novel offers. Throughout the narrative, Olanna takes refuge in Kano whenever she needs protection, and this need is strengthened by the contrast between Kano and Lagos. Uncle Mbaezi, her mother's brother, is held in high regard and "Sometimes Olanna wondered if she would admire him as she did if he were not so different from her mother" (*Ibid.*, 36). Moreover, Aunt Ifeka is the woman who breastfeeds Olanna and Kainene since their own mother "had given them to a nursing aunt only to save her own breasts from drooping" (*Ibid.*, 37). The spacious house in Lagos with its long hallways which do not give any room for intimacy is contrasted with Aunt Ifeka's one-bedroom house where the parents' privacy is preserved only by a thin curtain, exposing their lovemaking to their children. Creating a constant discourse of difference between the two households, the novel foregrounds the artificiality of Olanna's familial environment: "The artificiality of her parents' relationship always seemed harder, more shaming, when she was here in Kano" (*Ibid.*, 41). In this light, Adichie portrays Kano in contrast with Nsukka and Lagos as a unique location that evokes a feeling of security for the liminal black subjectivity due to its culturally diverse and working class environment.

The inclusion of Kano plays a crucial role in understanding the gender politics of the two different periods depicted in the novel, which is foregrounded through the nonlinear narrative within the four main sections. Olanna's madness is narrated in Part Two, which positions her trauma between Part One, where Olanna's subjectivity is challenged by a traditional black female subjectivity, and Part Three, where Olanna's domestic security is disrupted by betrayal. When Olanna is traumatized by Odenigbo's betrayal, the narrative demonstrates Kano and especially the feminine wisdom of Aunt Ifeka as a refuge. The novel emphasizes Aunt Ifeka's alternative female subjectivity: "Do you not have your own flat and your own job? Odenigbo has done what all men do and has inserted his penis in the first hole he could find when you were away. Does that mean somebody died?" (*Ibid.*, 213). Adichie utilizes Ifeka to reflect an intrinsic sense of femininity that is not dependent on male validation. Her relationship to her husband is contrasted with Olanna's parents, especially in the extramarital affair of her father, where her mother presents an acute awareness of exteriority: "When your uncle first married me, I worried because I thought those women outside would come and displace me from my home.

I now know that nothing he does will make my life change,” and she adds, “My life will change only if I want it to change” (*Ibid.*, 213). This maternal guidance and source of strength create a nurturing feminized space, the destruction of which is synced with the destruction of Kano’s heterogeneity. In the war period of the novel, an Igbo man tells Richard: “When I lost my whole family, every single one, it was as if I had been born all over again . . . I was a new person because I no longer had family to remind me of what I had been” (*Ibid.*, 303). Correspondingly, the loss of Aunt Ifeka and her family indicates a new self that is haunted and shaped by the violence of the war. Hued in gendered crisis, Olanna’s madness creates a bridge between the insanity of the early 1960s, which reflects a patriarchal set of values, and the violence of the war, which traumatizes the female subject upon the destruction of the heterogeneous female space. By making Kano a part of Olanna’s madness through the nonlinear narrative in the two periods, therefore, Adichie brings together the ethnic and gendered violence and foregrounds the domestication and feminization of the war narrative.

Another traumatic moment that triggers Olanna’s madness and creates a bridge between the pre-war and war period is the image of a severed head of a little girl with her mother carrying the head inside a calabash. Adichie exposes the scene only to Olanna:

The woman with the calabash nudged her, then motioned to some other people close by. “*Bianu*, come,” she said. “Come and take a look”. She opened the calabash. “Take a look,” she said again. Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl’s head with the ashy-grey skin and the plaited hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth (*Ibid.*, 141).

Similar to the Kano massacre, the novel utilizes Olanna’s haunted psyche to recapitulate the image of the little girl over and over again, thus, makes the suffering of a girl child a part of the war narrative. The critic of the emerging African literature, Brenda Cooper argues that the constant repetition of the image serves as a metonymic metaphor for the irrationality and the violence of the war (2013: 140) whereas Amy Novak regards it as the silencing of the female voice in the Biafran experience (2008: 46). Little attention, however, has been given to the connection between the dead girl and Olanna’s desire to be a mother. Right before the calabash

scene in the train, Olanna struggles to keep her burning eyes open and wets them with her saliva, which reminds her of the times she put her saliva on Baby's wounds. Likewise, on her return from Kano, Olanna is able to walk till she reaches Odenigbo's house. Only in the domestic sphere, her legs stop functioning. Ironically, it is Baby who finds Olanna.²⁰ It is possible to argue that by witnessing the cruel death of a little girl embraced by her mother, Olanna comes face to face with, in Kristeva's words, "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (1982: 4). The horrifying image of this maternal object underlines the irrationality of the gendered expectations of the pre-war Nigerian society and relates it to the other forms of violence and irrationality of the war. Contrary to Novak's argument, it might be claimed that the novel posits Olanna in the role of the speaker for the little girl and her mother; thereby it takes their pain from a zone of nonexistence to existence. Davoine and Gaudillière examine this ownership of the pain of another's death in war through Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of 'having pain in another person's body'. Wittgenstein argues, "Pain behaviour can point to a painful place, but the subject of pain is the person who gives it expression" (qtd. in Davoine and Gaudillière, 2004: 49). By giving expression to the suffering of her uncle, aunt, her pregnant cousin as well as the little girl in calabash through her madness, Olanna becomes the subject of their pain. This transformation, in turn, necessitates the recognition of what is not inscribed as the past by the majority. Similarly, Olanna's capability to make connections outside of dichotomous molar lines creates an opportunity to have a molecular consciousness toward the experience of war, where her evaluation of images and events, unlike others, are intertwined with the pre-war period. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, the line of flight does not tolerate any segments. Rather, it might be defined as the exploding of the molar and molecular segments (2005: 197). By connecting the peaceful times with the war; the dead with the living; the male with female through Olanna's madness, the narrative strips black femininity off any segments and presents everything without any molar distinctions.

²⁰ Earlier in the narrative, Olanna, unable to bear a child, decides to raise Baby, Odenigbo's child with Amala. The presence of Baby, therefore, indicates both her barrenness and her efforts to reshape the monolithic conceptualizations of motherhood.

Yellow Sun takes Olanna's resistance against gendered expectations to a different route by her decision to marry Odenigbo in the middle of her madness. Many critics have made a connection between the trajectory of the Biafran War and Olanna's personal experience as a female. Gloria Ajami Makokha interprets Olanna's marital status as a connection to Nigeria's recapture of Biafra (2014: 119). Seretha D. Williams, on the other hand, suggests that Olanna, within the confines of war, fails to live outside of social expectations. Instead, she embraces her socially expected roles as a wife and mother. Her madness "disrupts her progressive critique and rejection of patriarchy" (2017: 148). However, these critiques indicate an exclusively dualistic understanding of feminine identity, where marriage and motherhood are contrasted with the independent, free-spirited female subject. Ironically, Olanna's madness results from this very dualistic and arborescent categorization of femininity. Adichie portrays her marriage as the creation of a dynamic gender politics with the flower imagery. Throughout the novel, in critical moments, Olanna contacts flowers. When she moves to Odenigbo's house, the first thing she does is to throw the plastic flowers away. It horrifies Ugwu to see her replace them with fresh flowers from the garden: "But it die, mah. The other one don't die" (YS, 44). After she is forcefully grabbed by Chief Okonji, "She stopped to sniff the wilting flowers in a vase on the side table near the staircase, even though she knew their scent would be gone" (*Ibid.*, 32). When she tells her mother about her decision to be a surrogate mother to Baby against her mother's disapproval, "Olanna held the phone and stared at the flowers on the centre table. One of them had fallen off" (*Ibid.*, 139). The flowers are portrayed in direct proportion to Olanna's desire to be outside of socially expected roles—of being free from the rigid segmentarity. Whenever the static impositions of femininity entrap the black female subjectivity, the flowers wither. Instead of having never-withering but dead flowers at Odenigbo's house, Olanna urges a dynamic atmosphere that in its fluidity might be exposed to change/death. In like manner, during the wedding ceremony at the backdrop of the violence of the war, with the air raids disrupting their wedding, Olanna is offered plastic flowers. She refuses to carry them and attends to her wedding without any flowers. This symbolism indicates, in parallel with the rest of the novel, her refusal to be in a prosaic relationship with Odenigbo. Even though she becomes part of an

institution, she does not give in to its limitations. By having Olanna married without flowers, Adichie refutes the dichotomy of married, uneducated women and single, independent woman. The institution of marriage is not depicted solely as a means of perpetuating patriarchy but also as a compromise and desire for normalcy within the abnormality of the war.²¹

Along with marriage, the novel portrays Olanna's acceptance of surrogate motherhood for Baby as an explicit demonstration of feminine subjectivity rather than a submission to patriarchy. The narrator claims, "She had not felt sorry for the child. Instead, holding that tiny, warm body, she had felt a conscious serendipity" (*Ibid.*, 39). By not limiting the madwoman to biological motherhood, the narrative follows a rhizomatic direction that is not trapped in filiations but evokes alliances. Through Olanna's decision to have Baby and marry Odenigbo in the war, Adichie defies the fixed dualism of intellectual woman, who refuses to give in to wifedom and motherhood, and the traditional, uneducated woman, who goes with the socially determined roles. Her narrative suggests that feminism does not necessarily mean the rejection of all feminine roles, but rather, it requires conscious choice and adaptability to new circumstances. A role expected by society might coincide with the desires and needs of a free female agent. On a similar note, discussing the dangers of a line of flight that might lead one to a black hole and destruction, Deleuze and Guattari advise one to "have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO" (2005: 161). Through Olanna's choice of marriage and surrogate motherhood, the novel provides her a unique feminine territory to avoid a black hole, and instead of fleeing from the social norms, to shape them according to her own understanding of marriage and motherhood.

The narrative reveals Olanna's recovery process in ways that question the dichotomy of exteriority and interiority with regard to personal transformation. In her

²¹ Ironically, Christie Achebe underscores the gap between the pre-war expectations of women's marriage and the reality of war, as most men were either conscripted, or became war casualties, or were in hiding. Some women became promiscuous due to this unrealistic expectation in the abnormality of war. A new hairstyle named *di gbakwa oku* (marriage/husband can go to hell) came out as a form of rebellion (2010: 803). Olanna's marriage, therefore, is no longer within the norm.

analysis of Olanna's madness, Williams argues that the impetus for her recovery is testimony and her concomitant reintegration into community (2017: 153). However, Olanna's madness demonstrates a deeper meaning than the acknowledgement of her testimony by others. The novel reveals her reintegration into the community only after she reaches a line of flight—an inner journey that transforms her into a more integrated individual through the new possibilities that her madness opens up for a dynamic black subjectivity. Adichie delineates the recovery process not from outward to inward but from inward to outward. Olanna becomes an active participant in the community only after her inner conflicts are addressed. Her worsening mental instability is linked to the frequent air raids. The out-of-control state of pre-war gender roles are intertwined with the inevitability of death. However, during an air raid, Adichie exposes Olanna to, what one might call, an existential encounter with her mortality:

Another explosion came and the earth vibrated, and one of the naked children crawling after crickets giggled. Then the explosions stopped and the people around her began to move. If she had died, if Odenigbo and Baby and Ugwu had died, the bunker would still smell like a freshly tilled farm and the sun would still rise and the crickets would still hop around. The war would continue without them. Olanna exhaled, filled with a frothy rage. It was the very sense of being inconsequential that pushed her from extreme fear to extreme fury. She had to matter. She would no longer exist limply, waiting to die. Until Biafra won, the vandals would no longer dictate the terms of her life (*YS*, 266-7).

Death is represented to be the impetus for Olanna's recovery, for it is the ultimate equalizer and has no segments, no hierarchy, no gender. It treats humankind with indifference. Through her encounter with death, the narrative transforms Olanna into a person who does not depend on others for safety or clarity. Throughout the novel, she is portrayed to be trapped in her insecurities, doubts and fears. She always looks up to people like Odenigbo, Kainene and Miss Adebayo, who all seem to be surrounded with certainty. Adichie also underscores her dependency on external forces for self-validation and comfort through her African American friend Edna: "Look at you. You're the kindest person I know. Look how beautiful you are. Why do you need so much outside of yourself? Why isn't what you are enough?" (*Ibid.*, 219). Yet, Adichie turns the lack of clarity into a potential zone of creativity wherein

external factors do not shape one's subjectivity. The detachment from external forces leads to an escape from the destructive potential of the line of flight and transforms Olanna's madness into a self mechanism of creativity. Furthermore, her negative experience of uncertainty, contrasted with the certainty of others, turns into a dynamic space of agency that does not rely on and is not trapped in external systems of arborescence.

As Olanna's insecurities are mostly centered on her relationship with Odenigbo, the novel highlights her new attitude and transformation through the changes in their interaction. Odenigbo functions as a fixed point around which the madwoman's subjectivity revolves: "She had worried from time to time about Baby and Kainene and Ugwu dying, vaguely acknowledged the possibilities of future grief, but she had never conceived of Odenigbo's death. Never. He was her life's constant" (*Ibid.*, 305). Odenigbo's high idealism and his future-oriented outlook in life contradict with the complexity of Olanna's perception and her awareness of her surroundings. In the early 1960s, Odenigbo is always observed by different characters as someone "who looked so youthfully capable, who looked as if he needed nothing" (*Ibid.*, 6). Even in his relationship with Olanna, he seems to be self-sufficient. Richard observes "the way Odenigbo looked at her in the middle of an argument, not as if he needed her to be on his side, because he didn't seem ever to need anybody, but simply to know that she was there" (*Ibid.*, 104). Yet, as the conditions of their life change, and Odenigbo's evening parties are replaced with the inadequacy of daily life needs, he is deprived of certainty. Here, the novel reverses the importance of certainty and uncertainty. Whereas the certainty-driven subjectivities are formerly portrayed in the comfort of the molar segment, Olanna's previously excluded insanity turns into a mechanism of creativity and adaptability for new meanings outside of social norms that are invalidated by the war. Even though the narrative points out Olanna's desire to have Odenigbo's certainty, the unexpected presence of the war prioritizes loosely formed rhizomatic filiances over the clear-cut conceptualizations of identity prevalent in the pre-war period. The dependence that comes with the comfort and safety of the dichotomous molar segments is defied in the non-segmented obscurity of madness/line of flight. Instead, the novel renders

Olanna's experience of madness into a productive feminine space that defies the dependency on male presence:

She refused to worry about him. She worried about other things: how her periods were sparse and no longer red but a muddy-brown, how Baby's hair was falling out, how hunger was stealing the memories of the children. She was determined that their minds be kept alert; they were Biafra's future, after all (*Ibid.*, 368).

The female madness, evoked by the inability to fit in socially accepted norms of subjectivity, becomes the vehicle through which the female subject is first freed from binary oppositions such as male-female and then constructs an identity that in its very essence rejects meaning that only comes without.

The novel depicts the line of flight/madness in close connection with the creative potential of non-segmented female subjectivity which foregrounds intrinsic meaning within the self. Marta Caminero-Santangelo, regarding insanity as the final surrender to social norms, argues that the madwoman is unable to produce representations that are recognized as meaningful by society (1998: 11). Contrary to her argument, Olanna's madness goes through the process of meaninglessness to the self-creation of meaning. In the violent and irrational environment of the war, Olanna creates her own meaning by acting and producing. She joins a sewing group for the soldiers, builds a school at her house and teaches kids "perfect English and perfect Igbo" as well as the history of Biafra. She is the first one to get out of the bunker in air raids. On their way back to Nsukka at the end of the war, where a group of Northern soldiers stop them, it is again Olanna and not Odenigbo or Ugwu who challenges the soldiers. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, there is nothing imaginary in a line of flight; it is as real as the molar and molecular lines. It does not mean running away from segments and big social aggregates but causing runoffs in those segments (2005: 204). Similarly, there is nothing imaginary in the meaning Olanna creates for herself. By locating the madwoman on a line of flight, which can be creative and destructive at once, the narrative releases black female subjectivity from all segments and restrictions. It constructs a spatial freedom for the female subject who can exist without needing an external measure to define herself. Perhaps the most obvious representation of Olanna's inner transformation is revealed when she

burns her Biafran pounds under the lemon tree of their garden in Nsukka. Enraged by the Northern soldiers who barge in their house, Olanna does not want to keep the memories of Biafra on an external space where others can take it away: “She would not place her memory on things that strangers could barge in and take away” (YS, 408). When Odenigbo, who watches her disapprovingly, tells her she is burning memory, she says “My memory is inside me” (*Ibid.*). The tangible defeat of the Biafran community transforms into an intangible but also independent reality through Olanna’s defiance of the external judgment and classifications. Through Adichie’s deliberate examination of female madness, the delicate creation of meaning within and without is underlined, where the intangible concepts of nationality, memory and self-preservation are sustained in the non-segmentary structure of madness.

The intrinsic creation of meaning through madness constructs a heterogeneous zone of female agency in the novel. Olanna’s agency is interpreted in multiple, and sometimes contradictory, ways by critics especially with regard to Kainene’s mysterious disappearance at the end of the war. Novak claims that Olanna remains as the only active female subject in the novel. Yet, her agency is compromised as it is closely linked to finding Kainene (2008: 50) whereas Maureen Amaka Azuike puts Olanna above all the other female characters in Adichie’s oeuvre, as an amazon who does not succumb to despair no matter what happens including Kainene’s disappearance; she is the “true role model of the African woman” (2009: 90). Novak’s analysis hints at a contrast between Olanna’s agency and her suffering regarding the loss of her twin as well as her attempts to find her. Azuike, on the other hand, suggests an interpretation that oversimplifies Olanna’s reaction to Kainene’s disappearance. Instead of evaluating Olanna’s agency in a dichotomous structure, the novel necessitates a more complex reading of Olanna. She is desperate for her twin’s sudden disappearance. Yet, Adichie evokes a dynamic conceptualization of culture in her despair. In the early 1960s, when Ugwu mentions reincarnation, Olanna laughs at him and rejects the seemingly superstitious idea of reincarnation. However, after Kainene’s disappearance, the cultural belief is integrated into her psyche: ““Our people say that we all reincarnate, don’t they?” she said. ‘*Uwa m, uwa ozo*. When I come back in my next life, Kainene will be my

sister” (YS, 409). She re-evaluates her beliefs and shapes them according to her needs. Rather than the perfect epitome of female agency, Adichie portrays her as dynamic and non-segmented. Through Olanna’s madness and subsequent recovery, the narrative mirrors the destructive effects of certainty, dogmatism and dichotomous molar segmentarities of Nigerian society. All the confident, too undoubtful characters in the novel such as Odenigbo, Miss Adebayo and Kainene are stripped off their certainties. The way Adichie portrays Olanna requires the breakdown of dualistic segments. Olanna’s agency does not reject the interdependence of human beings, nor does it defy weaknesses. It is not by getting rid of her insecurities and fears that Olanna truly performs agency, but by being able to bring fear and confidence together, by accepting her own weaknesses and fears, yet still choosing to live according to her self-created values. By portraying her heroine in a heterogeneous way, Adichie rejects the idealization and mythification of the female agent, as the definition of agency, in contrast with moments of emotional weaknesses or personal insecurities, indicates imposing a superhuman quality to the female subject. Adichie empowers the female subjectivity with creativity and strength that come from the acceptance of one’s humanity: one’s freedom to be strong and weak at once, that is, the rejection of the idealized femininity.

Mirroring the un-documented side of the war, female madness necessitates a non-binary formation of individual and national subjectivity. Some feminist concerns of the novel revolve around the problem of the narrator and the silencing of the feminine experience within the war narrative. Aside from the four parts of the novel, *Yellow Sun* also has a book within the book, inserted between the chapters throughout the novel. The second book narrates the Nigerian and Biafran history within the bigger picture of the European colonial powers. Even though the writer of the book is thought to be Richard—due to the fact that he writes a book on the Igbo in most of the narrative—it turns out to be Ugwu. Olanna remains as the traumatized subject with no books to narrate her own experience. Nonetheless, Adichie emphasizes Olanna’s story not through words but her actions. Olanna is the only character who breaks down the social segments and has an egalitarian perspective. When Ugwu discusses the violence of the Northern soldiers, she claims “But we are all capable of doing the same things to one another” whereas Ugwu replies, “No,

mah. We are not like those Hausa people. The reprisal killings happened because they pushed us” (*Ibid.*, 168). Olanna, deprived of all segments, concentrates on ‘we’ while Ugwu’s perception is shaped by a dichotomy of us versus them. Although Ugwu includes Olanna’s war experiences in his book, his own story, the girl he rapes due to the group pressure of his fellow soldiers, remains untold. His story only focuses on the Biafrans as victims, but the very focus on Biafra excludes the North and the rest of Nigeria in his narrative. The ethnic other and the raped female subject, who is the proof of the other face of Biafra where a Biafran can harm another, are excluded. In a way, Ugwu’s narrative follows a monolithic pattern as with most historical narratives. On a similar pattern, Deleuze and Guattari claim that “History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus” (2005: 23). Olanna’s all-encompassing perspective which repudiates the creation of an exclusive Biafran identity that demonizes other ethnicities, the dichotomous gender politics and the unequal class consciousness cannot reside in the formal documentation of history, which is ‘sedentary’. Instead of portraying Olanna as the official narrator of the war, Adichie forms a creative space in her madness and lets her story be told without being a part of the exclusive discourse of the war. The madwoman, positioned on a non-segmentary line of flight, exists outside the socially constructed inscriptions of history, yet, becomes the representative of those who cannot inhabit the formal expressions of the war experience.

Davoine and Gaudillière argue that there can be no transition from the past to the present if the impact of the traumatic experience has immobilized time. The stories of these experiences transmit, from generation to generation, “pieces of a frozen time” (2004: xxx). Olanna’s madness brings into surface pieces of frozen time within the historical structure of Nigeria’s ethnic conflicts through giving voice to the silenced subjects of the war: a decapitated girl, a pregnant woman, a highly independent woman lost between borders. The madwoman’s constant recapitulation of those losses defies the forgetting of their memories and turns them into “a memory that does not forget” (*Ibid.*, xxiii). By portraying Olanna’s madness as part of the ethnic, gender and class divide, Adichie connects the past with the present in a way that explores the possibility of contextualizing contemporary conflicts in a larger picture and goes down to the core of the past, present, and possibly, future problems

of the country: the exclusion of difference and the tendency to force change from without rather than within. As the present chapter has analyzed, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the line of flight and their philosophical categorization of the personal identity into molar and molecular segmentations clarify the hidden dynamics of the social structures depicted in the novel. Since both the line of flight and the experience of madness carry creative and destructive potentials within themselves, their role in the critique of the socially constructed divisions necessitates a double-sided, heterogeneous perspective. Both Deleuze and Guattari as well as Adichie underscore the complexity and necessity of divisions without creating a hierarchical discourse. Olanna's madness, within this non-segmented, non-hierarchical framework, entails an inner journey that embraces differences, contradictions and uncertainty as part of human existence.

CHAPTER TWO

REVOLUTION AND MADNESS IN *MERIDIAN*

The present chapter explores the title character's multi-dimensional experience of madness in an attempt to reveal the hidden links between different layers of oppression permeating both the black community and the larger north American society in the 60s and 70s. The chapter argues that the novel challenges the radical understanding of change prevalent in these historical periods since Meridian's madness exposes the need for a more flexible and, at the same time, more demanding journey of self and social transformation. Contrary to the separatist and unitary discourse of the historical framework, this transformation starts within, not without. In accordance with the examination of gendered madness in *Yellow Sun*, the present chapter utilizes the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the line of flight in order to reflect the non-segmented and creative structure of Meridian's madness. Discussing intertextuality, scholar Graham Allen stresses the importance of the comparative reading of different literary works where "a potentially vast number of relations coalesce" (2000: 12). In like manner, the representation of black female madness as a line of flight will be explored in dialogue with *Yellow Sun*. The first sub-section of the chapter will discuss the cultural and historical specificity of the novel, namely, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement and women's position at the backdrop of these movements. The second sub-section will deconstruct various aspects of the ideal black femininity of the period prevalent in domestic and political spheres through the alternative femininity represented by Meridian's subjectivity. Last but not least, the third sub-section will focus on Meridian's inner transformation that is initiated by her madness. This transformation, in turn, leads to the breakdown of the dichotomies within the body-mind, male-female and separatist-integrationist discourses. Through the application of the line of flight and the comparison of two literary works whose madwomen are restricted by similar indoctrinations of racial and gendered normalcy, the chapter seeks to create a more dynamic, complex and interdisciplinary understanding of the literary representation of gendered madness.

The contextualization of *Meridian* within the larger framework of African American literature of the period sheds light on the interlocking elements of

mainstream culture, political crises and the peculiar depiction of the black madwoman. Imbued with a sense of re-creation and formerly unprecedented possibilities, the postwar epoch of African American history offers a great number of literary works that emerged out of the liberation movements of the 60s and 70s including the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement and the feminist movement. Especially the prolific nature of the 70s witnessed the emergence of black female playwrights, poets and novelists which led many scholars to define the period as the literary renaissance of black female writing.¹ Among the most challenging works of the period are *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977) by Toni Morrison; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) by Maya Angelou; *Corregidora* (1975) and *Eva's Man* (1976) by Gayl Jones; *Prophets for a New Day* (1970) by Margaret Walker; *We a BaddDDD People* (1970) by Sonia Sanchez; and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1971), *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* (1973), *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973) by Alice Walker.² As many critics have observed, these works which were written either by first-time black female writers or writers who had written before but had not gained any literary acclaim explored the racial and sexist dynamism of the postwar America within and out of the black community. Their multi-dimensional critique of the African American and mainstream culture created an alternative representation of black femininity that had previously been monolithic and dependent on white and black male discourse. In the midst of this prominently creative period of black female artistic subjectivity and self-articulation, Walker published her second novel *Meridian* in 1976, which mirrors and challenges both the male-dominated and the feminist representations of black femininity in a more radical orientation than most of the literary works of its time.

¹ It is important to note that the constantly proliferating black female writing of the period did not go hand in hand with recognition and acknowledgement of literary establishments. Walker's biographer Evelyn C. White underlines the lack of attention to black female writers such as Phillis Wheatley, Nella Larsen, Francis E. W. Harper, Paule Marshall and even soon-to-be internationally acclaimed novelist Toni Morrison in the early 70s (2005: 222).

² For a more detailed list and analysis of black female writers of the postwar era, see Melissa Graves Walker's *Down from the Mountaintop: Black Women's Novels in the Wake of the Civil Rights Movement, 1966-1989* (1991); bell hooks' *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992); Madhu Dubey's *Black Women Novelists and the National Aesthetic* (1994); and Eleanor W. Traylor's "Re Calling the Black Woman" (2005), ix-xxiii.

In a dialogical relation to the above-mentioned works, *Meridian* carries the traces of the literary renaissance of the 70s that put the artistic expression of the author and her female protagonist against the highly masculinized black identity. This black identity is centered on the Black Arts Movement of the same decade, which was highly influential in the ways female writers perceived themselves and how they reacted to the already existing representations of their gendered experiences as black women. Given the fact that black female writers were influenced by the Black Arts Movement in ways that are at once contradictory and harmonious, it is important to avoid the polarization of the two groups. Nonetheless, black female writers including Walker questioned and reconstituted the norms of the Black Arts Movement with regard to their understanding of the ideal target audience/readership, the ‘truest’ representation of black experience and the ideological aesthetics. Created out of the racial assertion and separatist ideology of Black Power, the Black Arts Movement questioned the validity of the ‘oppressor’s side’ of the story. Black Arts critic Larry Neal puts forth the following questions to be the main concerns of the black aesthetic: “Whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors’? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors?” (1968: 30). For the writers of the movement, America is split into two worlds: that of whites and blacks, which leads to an exclusive understanding of their audience and readership. Critic Frances S. Foster delineates the racially homogenized outlook of the movement: “Their writing is about Black people for Black people by Black people. Any white audience is ignored” (1973: 444). This idea of writing exclusively for black people created an ideological and artistic pressure on the black writers whose worldview was not split up in a clear-cut distinction between white and black cultures that the Black Arts Movement so adamantly believe to be non-negotiable. Walker, with her rejection of exclusion of any reader based on race or any other mark of difference, defies the solely black-oriented perspective of the movement. In her essay “The Unclamorous but Worthwhile Duties of the Black Revolutionary Artist,” originally published in 1971, she offers a more flexible and inclusive black authorship: “The truest and most enduring impulse I have is simply to write. It seems necessary for me to forget all the titles, all the labels, and all the hours of talk” (1983:

125).³ Instead, she defines herself without centralizing her racial identity: “I have not labeled myself yet. I would like to call myself revolutionary, for I am always changing, and growing, it is hoped for the good of more black people” (*Ibid.*). This challenge, in turn, shapes the way *Meridian* is constructed as a literary text that merges and blurs racial demarcations in an era of ideological divisions and its ambiguous reception by critics.

Another dilemma arising out of the difference between the Black Arts Movement and female artistic expression concerns the discussion of the truest representation of black experience which equals the experience of the black male. In his description of the movement, Neal marks out the main concern of the black artist as “to confront the contradictions arising out of the *Black man*’s experience in the racist West” [my emphasis] (1968: 29). The equation of black experience with the black male subject takes the specificity of the black femininity for granted and turns Black Arts into a monolithic and homogeneous space of literary expression. As the African American literature scholar Madhu Dubey points out, the unitary conception of the black experience of the Black Arts does not give room to other forms of black subjectivity that differ from the norm such as gender difference (1994: 10).⁴ The black female writers like Morrison and Walker who challenge the sexist and patriarchal structure of the period are considered “male haters” (Springer, 2006: 115).⁵ Quoting Deborah McDowell, Dubey also elucidates the tendency of the Black

³ Walker’s insistence on an independent voice that is not bound to an exclusive sense of racial belonging evoked harsh criticism, which was also exacerbated by her personal life including her white Jewish husband, Mel Leventhal (1967-1976) and her biracial daughter, Rebecca Walker (White, 2005: 194).

⁴ The male-oriented representation of the Black Arts fiction is strengthened by its constant insistence on the need to reconstruct and revolutionize the black family in which “‘men were men and women were women, in surprisingly conservative ways” (Smethurst, 2005: 87). For the analyses of some Black Arts Movement plays that focus on the psychological emasculation of the black male and the reconstruction of the black family, see Neal’s article “The Black Arts Movement” (1968), 28-39.

⁵ Scholar Kimberly Springer particularly draws attention to Toni Cade Bambara’s anthology *The Black Woman* (2005), originally published in 1970 in which many black female writers and activists such as Walker, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde and Nikki Giovanni explore the intersection of race and gender politics of the period; Michele Wallace’s *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (2015), first published in 1978 and Ntozake Shange’s controversial play *For Colored Girls* (2010), originally published in 1975, as texts that created a counter-representation for the male-oriented black experience of the period (2006). However, unlike Walker who preferred a more individualistic path, there were many important female writers who chose to challenge the misogyny of the movement

Arts fiction to insist on a positive and stable black identity that is solely based on racial difference (1994: 12). Therefore, the negative representations of black men and any indication of lack of unity within the black community against the white onlookers were not tolerated. Black women who offered alternative perspectives of the black experience in which the black male took the position of the oppressor at times created a sense of betrayal for the black male who did not share the patriarchal privileges of his white counterpart. Together with the unitary, stable and 'revolutionary' black literature, the rejection of the literary ancestry is considered to be the necessary step for transformation and improvement for the black experience and its literary representation. The literary works produced during the mid-60s to mid-70s under the tenets of the Black Arts Movement postulate a unique understanding of ancestry that defies their predecessors such as the Harlem Renaissance authors who "failed" to ask the necessary questions. The past is considered 'the enemy of the revolutionary' (Neal, 1968: 34) and a fall that needs to be transcended (Smethurst, 2005: 77). The masculinized understanding of patriarchal ancestry and the concomitant negative perception of the past perpetuate an undeniable contestation between *Meridian* and the period that gave birth to it. As will be discussed in the following sections of the chapter, *Meridian*, despite and because of the period it is produced, presents a fictional world that is highly connected to its external reality. It defies easy categorizations through its inclusion of white readership, its multi-faceted representation of the black male/female experience and its matrifocal narrative that values history and creates a dialogical connection among the past and present experiences of black femininity.

2.1. The Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement and the Question of Women

Covering the first decades of the postwar America, *Meridian* engages with the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement in the 60s and 70s. In a direct dialogue with Black Arts Movement, these decades reveal the contradictory

from within such as Sonia Sanchez, Gwendolyn Brooks and Elma Lewis, to name a few (Smethurst, 2005: 85).

and multi-dimensional position of black experience regarding its relation to the larger community—from integrationism and assimilation to separatism and construction of an exclusive, assertive racial identity, both of which are explored in the novel within the question of women. Historians consider the years from 1954 to 1965 to be the Civil Rights Era, starting from the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that declared the segregation of public schools unconstitutional in 1954 to Selma to Montgomery, Alabama March in 1965. "The demand for an end to legal segregation and discrimination in voting, housing, education, employment, and public accommodations" was the central issue for the social, cultural and political divisions of the era (Collier-Thomas and Franklin, 2001: 2). The civil rights protests and demonstrations for equal opportunities with the non-black citizens inaugurated a unique spirit of dynamic activism and an incorrigible search for a more confident and politically validated black identity.

Civil Rights Movement emerged as a form of protest against the Jim Crow laws in the South that were based on the "separate but equal" doctrine. It started with Montgomery bus boycott initiated by Rosa Parks' refusal to give her seat to a white man, which, after a year of boycotting, ended on November 13, 1956 with the Supreme Court's decision to declare the segregation of buses unconstitutional. However, when four students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University decided to sit in at a Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro in 1960, the non-violent but self-assured spirit of the youth spread all over the country, thereby transforming the movement into a catalyst for years of inequality and sociopolitical deprivation.⁶ The continuing protests of the students in racially segregated public institutions were transformed into the organization SNCC (The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) at a meeting in April 1960.⁷ SNCC, an independent

⁶ Scholar Manning Marable accentuates the key position of the sit-in movement by calling it the beginning of the Second Reconstruction that pivoted non-violent direct action as the dominant strategy in the struggle for racial equality (1984: 66-7) whereas writer and historian Paula J. Giddings draws attention to its enormous spread around both the South and the North for it "involved more people than any other civil rights movement in history" with the participation of some 70,000 people in 18 months, which led, after more than 3,600 arrests, 101 communities to desegregate their eating places (2007: 245).

⁷ It is important to note that it was none other than Ella Baker, the executive director of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) who came up with the idea of bringing

organization that had a different and more dynamic structure from the older civil rights movements, prioritized its engagement with the people in the rural South who had been bypassed by former organizations. The mutual goal of freedom and equality of the students and the long-ignored rural citizens was created out of SNCC's activities on voter registrations and freedom schools. Their 'group-centeredness' and lack of rigid hierarchies gave room to a more flexible and daring environment which brought various types of people together (Giddings, 2007: 247). Under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., the strategy of non-violence was sustained through sit-ins, marches and what the activists called 'freedom rides' to desegregate public facilities. Yet, the strategy of non-violence came into demise when the Washington March, where 250,000 people listened to King's 'I Have a Dream' speech in August 1963, was followed by the bombing in Birmingham that wounded many people and killed four black girls. Despite the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, lack of tangible results after the Washington March and the concomitant bombing left many people including SNCC activists disillusioned and led them to question the validity and efficacy of non-violence as the ideal strategy to gain rights. Even though the practice of Jim Crow laws ended and some legal rights such as voting were gained, serious problems remained unsolved. As much as the white liberals expected blacks to be satisfied with the outcome, black workers and sharecroppers were still exposed to bombings, lynchings and rapes as much as to disadvantages regarding economic security and housing (Marable, 1984: 94). The 'victory' that was supposed to come with the electoral rights was incomplete and unsubstantiated by the daily lives of many African Americans.

The disillusionment and frustration for the failure of the non-violent civil disobedience and the desire to be integrated into the mainstream society on equal terms gave way to a more radical, militant and assertive Black Power Movement from the mid-60s to mid-70s. Historian and cultural critic Jeffrey O. C. Ogbar elucidates the difference between two movements through their stance toward the

different student groups together and sponsored the meeting in 1960. Recent scholars have underlined Baker's initiative into such an important organization with regard to popular black male leaders such as King. It has been shown as an indication of women's role in the creation of SNCC. According to Giddings, women's involvement in SNCC made the organization more dynamic and progressive in the history of Civil Rights (2007: 248).

white society. Ogbar argues that the non-violent civil rights workers strived for integration which was based on white approval, as the majority/white population was perceived to be normative in contrast to the militant nationalists of the Black Power who refuted the desirability of white norms (2006: 226).⁸ Despite the common belief in black separatism, however, Black Power was considered 'elusive and imprecise' since the radical blacks disagreed among themselves about the definition of Black Power (Marable, 1984: 107), which led destructive polemics over the truest black nationalism that ended many friendships and marriages (*Ibid.*, 152-3). The lack of unity among black nationalists and their violent rhetoric were turned into an advantage for the majority. As the rhetoric of the demand for equality became militant and uncompromising, the national media portrayed black nationalist militants as 'racial demagogues' who dangerously moved toward an ideal of black separatism (*Ibid.*, 105). Under the presidency of Richard Nixon, conservative Republican and Democratic parties employed the slogan 'law and order' that provoked reactionary anxieties on the whites, which justified the illegal executions of Black Power defenders in the eyes of the public (*Ibid.*, 142). Therefore, the more self-assured and radical ideology of the Black Power activists ended up in the same disillusionment with the Civil Rights Movement: the difficulty of unlearning and purging the racial inferiority that reigned through the minds and lives of the masses.

In the midst of the struggle for racial equality, black women experienced and demanded a more multi-positioned space for political and social opportunities. In the early 60s, SNCC provided the most welcoming atmosphere for the political expression of the female, and women activists such as Ella Baker, Ruby Doris Smith and Gloria Richardson played an active role in shaping the movement. However, along the same time as the non-violence strategy lost popularity among the frustrated black masses, women were relegated to inferior positions. Giddings makes a

⁸ Dubey highlights the conflict between the anti-racist and anti-integrationist ideologies of the Black Power that opposed the existence of Jim Crow laws but concurrently strived for all-black economic, political and social institutions (1994: 60). Likewise, Joyce Green interprets the militant separatism of the Black Power as being dependent on the white myth which defines whiteness in contrast to blackness: "Are the super-liberals and the ultra-militants Siamese twins, fused together by the fibers of this Black/White myth, declaring independence while owing their existence to this very linkage?" (2005: 171).

connection between the one-dimensional and dichotomous structure of nationalism and sexism as she claims the most nationalist men were also the most sexist (2007: 283). Even though women activists challenged their supposedly inferior status, the common belief postulated that the woman was subordinate to the black man and was only a supporter for him since he was the natural leader of racial struggle (Ward, 2006: 124). The stereotypical racist image of the black man as primitive and strong was adapted to the Black Power discourse in a romanticized and celebratory rhetoric (hooks, 1999: 96). The constant enforcement of the wild, strong black male image required the submissive and inferior black woman whose contribution to the revolution was to give birth to revolutionary babies. Birth control was considered white men's attempt for black genocide (Fleming, 2001: 209). Along with the already sexist structure of the liberation movements, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's government-financed 1965 report "The Negro Family" widened the gap between black men and women. In his analysis of the Negro family, which he calls "the nation's oldest, and most intransigent, and now its most dangerous problem" (1965: iii), Moynihan explains the deterioration of the black community as the deterioration of the black family, downplaying the social and political depth of the racial inequality to an intrinsic problem between men and women. According to the report, given the specific social and political history of African American society including slavery and lack of job opportunities for the black male, the black family was "forced into a matriarchal structure" which in itself is not negative, but when contextualized into the patriarchal American society, it creates an inferior status for the black male (*Ibid.*, 29). The male-biased perspective of the report indicated that the sociopolitical and economic problems the black community had were not due to unequal life standards for the whites and blacks but to the unjustified power and control black women had over black men. Moynihan received harsh criticism from the black female writers and activists regarding his scapegoating of black women and his patriarchal comradeship with black men. Activist Gwen Patton denounced his analysis which was "partly responsible for dividing black men and women" and made black men "look upon their women as a strange breed who were against them and trying to make them weak" (2005: 182). On a similar note, Giddings reads between the lines of the report which implies "black women would somehow have to

slow down, become less achievement-oriented, give up much of their independence. By remaining assertive, they were ruining the family and so ruining the race” (2007: 294). Acting strong, resilient and assertive—not out of choice but of necessity—black women were called Aunt Jemimas, Sapphires, Amazons and matriarchs, which were, in many ways, incongruent with the overly-emphasized male chauvinism of the period (hooks, 1999: 70). Given the internal conflicts and disagreement over the best expression of the black experience in the 60s and 70s, the politically active and engaging postwar epoch of the black identity was shaped, disrupted and damaged by lack of unity, which, in Audre Lorde’s words, was mistaken for unanimity (2007: 136). This lack of unity turned an era of countless possibilities into a state of perpetual incongruity and uncertainty.

2.2. The Schizo Position: The Polarization of the Black Female Subjectivity

Taking place in the midst of the racial upheaval of the 70s, together with flashbacks to the 60s, *Meridian* narrates the story of its title character, Meridian, in ways that question and deconstruct the separatist ideology of the Black Power Movement and its extreme images of the black woman as either weak and useless or a superwoman who can handle and bear anything. In her essay “Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O’Connor,” Walker rejects the idea that she, as an African American woman in a racist and sexist society, is ‘whole’ since “Everything around me is split up, deliberately split up: history split up, literature split up, and people are split up too” (1983: 55). Arguing that this split-up state of history, art and individual identities induces people to do ‘ignorant things’, she underscores the importance of making connections that can create a richer and more complex understanding of one’s identity and one’s relation to others. Written within the same agenda, *Meridian* explores the title character’s personal and political life which ends up in a multi-positioned madness. Meridian’s madness—explored in the flashbacks and foreshadowings of the non-linear, fractured narrative—refutes one-dimensionality of her ‘illness’. Through the similar patterns in her experience with

intra-gender, inter-gender and intra-racial relations that are 'split-up' and trapped in molar segmentarity, *Meridian* necessitates the deconstruction of the one-rootedness of the black female subjugation which reveals the correlation between gendered madness and the insanity of the larger community of the postwar America. Created out of the non-linear third-person narrative that jumps in space and time, Meridian's experience as a black daughter, wife, mother and Civil Rights activist is imbued with dichotomous impositions and requires the re-examination of the molar segmentarities that are first represented by her silence toward these overlapping polarizations and concomitantly, exposed more explicitly by her madness.

The non-linear and cyclical structure of *Meridian* has been interpreted in multifarious ways by critics in an attempt to shed light on the thematic analysis of Meridian's personal and political life where she is often seen to be the outcast within and out of the black community. The novel is divided into three main sections which are respectively called "Meridian," "Truman Held" and "Ending." Each section is also divided into multiple chapters that at times follow a linear storyline but mostly narrate the story in various periods and spaces, exposing the "split-up" state of its period. In an interview with Claudia Tate, originally published in 1983, Walker compares the structure of the novel to a 'crazy quilt'—a story "that works on the mind in different patterns" and "can jump back and forth in time, work on many levels, and one that can include myth" (2010: 98). Similar to Walker's suggestion of the crazy quilt that demands a conjugal reading of different modes and themes, scholar Janelle Collins draws attention to the general tendency of critics to analyze the personal and political dimensions of Meridian's identity separately and instead, interprets the structure of the novel as a 'collage' that gives room to the combination of Meridian's personal subjectivity with her political subjectivity, both of which equally subvert the dominant ideology of the period. This, in turn, Collins argues, defies essentialized readings of the text, for Walker avoids prioritization of any discourse over the other (2000: 162). Another critic, Leslie E. Wingard, proposes an alternative analogy to the fragmented, non-linear narrative: stained glass. Wingard asserts that, unlike the quilt metaphor that is too stagnant to reflect the multi-layered discourses of the story, the stained glass in which "the moving light that touches the glass does not allow us to forget that layers (like race history or religious history)

resonate with each other” (2012: 100). In a comparable manner to Collins, she utilizes the metaphor as a way to bring different aspects of the story together, in this case, the ‘artificial’ division between the sacred and secular in the novel. In parallel to these metaphors which reflect the variety of discourses and their interconnectedness, the relation between Meridian’s multi-dimensional experience of madness and the fragmented, non-linear structure of the novel can be analyzed through the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the ‘rhizome’. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the rhizome stands against the arborescent system of thought, which is dichotomous and relies on a hierarchical single unity. Contrary to the ‘tree’, the rhizome has “no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*,” and its fabric is the conjunction “and. . . and. . .” [emphasis in the original] (2005: 35). As many scholars have already pointed out, lack of hierarchy among the racial, gendered and political elements of the novel, which is reflected in the intertwined yet fractured narrative, requires a more complicated and interconnected reading of the story. Little attention has been given, however, to the connection between the multi-faceted structure of the novel and Meridian’s madness, which itself defies a single and hierarchical unity. The application of the rhizome creates a dynamic and subversive analysis of Meridian’s madness since her experience leads her to a transition from the arborescent values of her society to a rhizomatic line of flight. Similar to a set of rhizomatic points that are loosely connected to one another through the conjunction ‘and’, the fractured narrative of the novel juxtaposes different power structures within the postwar American society in a way that uncovers both the multifarious reasons for the maddening of the black female subject and her subsequent deconstruction of these highly hierarchical and exclusive structures.⁹

⁹ Analyzing the structural variety of the narrative and the portrayal of the black female subjectivity in the novel, Madhu Dubey criticizes lack of clarity in the “abundance of meanings” the novel sometimes cannot carry (1994: 181). She argues that both the contradictory modes of the narrative and contradictory aspects of Meridian’s character defy a final resolution or synthesis (*Ibid.*). However, the depiction of the female madness in the novel, through its rhizomatic flexibility, serves as a bridge that mediates between these contradictory elements of both the narrative structure and black femininity. By means of the insertion of the madness narrative, the conflicts arising out of the multivalence of the structure and gender representation, the novel creates what Deleuze and Guattari call “disjunctive synthesis” which defies the exclusive and restrictive nature of disjunctions and utilizes it in an

The fractured narrative provides a route to interpret the interrelation between Meridian's madness and the dilemma of resistance/submission within the larger political and patriarchal context. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate a rhizomatic direction from an arborescent understanding of beginning and end. They argue that the idea of a clean slate or of starting from zero gives one the false impression of voyage and movement that is "methodological, pedagogical, initiatory" (2005: 35). Instead, they favor a movement from and toward the middle which evokes "coming and going rather than starting and finishing" since the middle does not refer to average, on the contrary, it is "where things pick up speed" (*Ibid.*). The three main sections of the novel, through their interconnectedness in form and content, also defy the idea of beginning from zero and follow an endless circle of comings and goings between time, space and focal points. Rather than starting with Meridian's younger self, which can be regarded as the beginning of the story, or Meridian's recovery from her illness and madness, the novel starts in the middle of her transition from subjugation to self-actualization. She is introduced to the reader for the first time during her political struggle and sickness as a "weird gal" who challenges the authorities in her non-violent protest against the racial hierarchy that does not let the black children in the town to see the white mummy woman of the circus, Marilyn O'Shay (*MER*, 13). Being dead for twenty five years and mummified by her husband as the "Twelve Human Wonders of the World," Marilyn O'Shay constructs the gendered expectations of the postwar era. She is labeled as "Obedient Daughter," "Devoted Wife," "Adoring Mother" and "Gone Wrong" for she, as a woman given everything she needed and wanted by her husband, "had gone outside the home" (*Ibid.*). By creating a contrast between Meridian's recovering but still sick state and the mummy woman, the narrative first establishes a sense of distance between the protagonist and the social expectations of society. However, in the same chapter, the reader witnesses Meridian's illness and concomitantly learns about her past experiences a decade ago in a way that connects her female subjugation to that of Marilyn O'Shay. By exposing Meridian's past and present experiences

affirmative way (2000: 76). The exploration of madness, thus, creates an opportunity to merge contradictions without destroying their unique elements and mirrors the complexity of the interrelation between different forms of oppression and the black female subjectivity.

interconnectedly from the middle of the storyline, the narrative recapitulates and conjugates the never-ending circle of patriarchal and racial domination over feminine subjectivity.¹⁰ Therefore, the rhizomatic nature of the madness represented in the novel disrupts the repetitive correlation between two women. It creates a flight from the restrictive patriarchal definitions of femininity.

The association of the female experience with death is further reconstituted at the end of the first section of the novel, creating a circle of gendered narratives that come and go between death and life. After the narration of the 60s that takes up the 'Meridian' section of the novel, Walker closes the narration with the chapter called 'the Recurring Dream' where the narrator repeats a single sentence three times in three subsequent lines: "She dreamed she was a character in a novel and that her existence presented an insoluble problem, one that would be solved only by her death at the end" (*Ibid.*, 108). The position of the chapter at the first section which explores multiple representations of black female subjectivity through mini-stories of Fast Mary, the Wild Child and even Marilyn O'Shay, whose problems are solved with their death, constructs gendered madness and its subversive potential in contrast to these alternatives. Aside from the fact that the dream indicates the self-referentiality of the story, which defies and subverts death as the only solution for the rebellious black woman, the repetition of the sentence three times hints at the three-dimensionality of the novel and the factors behind Meridian's mental and physical breakdown: motherhood, womanhood and political activism. Unable to fit the ideal image of a black daughter/mother, black wife/woman and the ideal Civil Rights activist, Meridian is entrapped in a discourse of exclusion. She occupies what Deleuze and Guattari call "a schizo position" where, instead of fitting and following the majority, the individual is positioned on the periphery (2005: 34). Hence, in a comparable resemblance to Olanna, Meridian is portrayed as conflicted between her sense of self and the gendered and racial positioning of the black female subject. This inevitable liminality or the schizo position of the madwoman explored in the fiction

¹⁰ Interestingly, the implication of the parallel between a dead woman and a madwoman is not unique to *Meridian*. *Yellow Sun* also presents the same resemblance in the scene where Ugwu, watching Mama, suspects that she tries to make sure "only Olanna died or became barren or went mad" (YS, 202), thus, creating a dialogical pattern between the two texts and their respective cultures.

of culturally divergent female writers creates a familiar pattern of exclusion, entrapment and multi-rootedness of the experience of madness.

As one part of the multi-narrative, the novel reflects Meridian's schizo position through the gap between the expected gender roles of her community and her feeling of unease within these roles, which is explored through the arborescent interference of her mother's presence in various settings of the novel.¹¹ The construction of a unique feminine subjectivity is highly shaped by the conceptions of idealized black womanhood. Similar to the narrative of *Yellow Sun* where the free-spirited portrayal of Olanna is disrupted by the contrasting image of her mother, *Meridian* delineates different forms of black femininity, one of which perpetually thwarts and entraps the other. Unlike *Yellow Sun*, which offers Olanna an alternative female subjectivity through her aunt who provides maternal support and affirmation, however, *Meridian* does not depict another female role model for the title character who, in turn, is deprived of possible interpretations of black womanhood. She is more exposed to the feelings of self-doubt, guilt and lack of self-worth. In *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman*, Chesler declares that her analysis of women's treatment to one another in destructive and harmful ways questions the politically correct views that "women are morally superior to and more powerful than men, that all women are sisters" (2009: xii). Correspondingly, *Meridian* defies the idealization of black woman-to-woman relations and the image of the all-powerful, endearing black mother through the exploration of the destructive effects of the mythification of black femininity on the female psyche. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari shed light on the impact of family over one's perception of what is socially acceptable and what is not:

Retention is the primary function of the family: it is a matter of learning what elements of desiring-production the family is going to reject, what it is going to retain, what it is going to direct along the dead-end roads leading to its own undifferentiated (the miasma), and what on the contrary it is going to lead down the paths of a contagious and reproduceable differentiation (2000: 125).

¹¹ Ironically the areas Meridian 'fails' to fit are closely connected to the above-mentioned descriptions used for Marilyn O'Shay: daughter, wife and mother. In a subtle way, the novel hints at the similarity between the experience of a white and a black women with regard to gender roles. However, Meridian's madness, as opposed to the death of Marilyn O'Shay not only carries the patriarchal domination over the female body and psyche but also the racial tension and its debilitating effects.

Consequently, the family is seen as the milestone for the construction of identity and how, Deleuze and Guattari argue, that identity is going to be shaped in relation to social norms and segments. In like manner, *Meridian* depicts the construction of feminine subjectivity as closely knotted with family, which mirrors the racial and gender segments of society. The constant flashbacks related to Meridian's family, especially her mother, are dispersed in the story in a way that becomes the lens through which the gendered madness is shaped and problematized.

The novel reveals the destructive effects of the monolithic perception of black femininity on the individual and the collective consciousness through the inconsistency between Mrs. Hill's self-perception and the contrasting perspective put forth by the narrator. The standards and values of Mrs. Hill permeate the first main section of the novel upon which the basis of Meridian's mental and physical breakdown is founded. By utilizing the third-person narrative which switches between inner monologues and the external impositions, Walker continuously brings the clash between the individual and society into the foreground. She employs Mrs. Hill to reflect the gap between the norms of postwar America—manifested in Mrs. Hill's words and actions—and her inner frustration with the same restricting norms. The exteriority of the black female subjectivity clashes with its own interiority. Her past choices rotate around the dichotomous experience of men and women. Being a teacher with income and independence, Walker portrays her as driven by the assumptions of the single woman's incompleteness to such a degree that she imagines other women, who fall in love and get married, to have "a state of euphoria." Yet, the novel contrasts her perception of what she needs and wants as a single woman with that of the narrator: "Her mother was not a woman who should have had children. She was capable of thought and growth and action only if unfettered by the needs of dependents, or the demands, requirements, of a husband" (*MER*, 43). The contrast between Mrs. Hill's previous independence and her submission to the expectations of society is further strengthened by her experience of motherhood upon which she realizes that "she was not even allowed to be resentful

that she was ‘caught’” (*Ibid.*, 44).¹² Even though the external reflections of Mrs. Hill’s motherhood are in direct proportion to the idealized image of black motherhood prevalent in the period, the novel emphasizes the artificiality of Mrs. Hill’s “perfect” exteriority by contrasting it with her inner world. The omnipresent narration in the chapter “Have You Stolen Anything?” Which focuses on Meridian’s sense of guilt toward her mother, is utilized to explore Mrs. Hill’s inner world. Contrary to her exterior image, it is made up of silent screams of resentment and unuttered words of disappointment with the married life that looks so joyful and satisfying from afar. Her desire to fit the socially accepted behavior—sexist as they might be in their nature—leads her to a state of exclusion and a one-dimensional understanding of black femininity, which equals her own disappointing and psychologically-crippling experience.¹³ Meridian’s exposure to this self-hatred embedded with the hatred of the world that burdens her with responsibilities of the ideal woman, in turn, creates a seemingly permanent sensitivity for unworthiness and a sense of guilt: “It was for stealing her mother’s serenity, for shattering her mother’s emerging self, that Meridian felt guilty from the very first, though she was unable to understand how this could possibly be her fault” (*Ibid.*, 45). By underlining the monopoly of Mrs. Hill’s perception of ‘the ideal woman’ as the filter through which the madwoman’s subjectivity is defined, evaluated and judged, Walker not only challenges the idealization of the motherhood for the female subject (the mother) but also questions the validity of exclusive maternal judgment and guidance for the object (the daughter).

¹² bell hooks interprets the Victorian-like values and gendered expectations of the postwar culture as a compensation of the patriarchal system for the lack of domination of men over women since—due to the conditions brought about by war—women became more independent and assertive. The misogynist ideology of the black men in the 50s that suggested the black woman should be subordinate to black men, occupying a more domestic space, arise out of the need to respond to the patriarchal needs of the era (1999: 177). In return, “the pursuit of idealized femininity” of the period required a less assertive, less independent and more obedient black femininity (*Ibid.*, 178).

¹³ Ironically, in the same chapter, the narrative brings forth alternative reactions to Mrs. Hill’s experience. The narrator points out the ways Mrs. Hill refuses any form of creativity within domesticity such as learning how to cook well or braid well: “Creativity was in her, but it was refused expression. It was all deliberate. A war against those to whom she could not express her anger or shout, “It’s not fair!”” (*MER.*, 45). Therefore, Mrs. Hill’s silent and destructive inward resistance creates an opposite viewpoint to Meridian’s subsequent resistance. By multiplying feminine resistance to the norms in opposite directions, Walker refutes the monolithic portrayal of black femininity.

Between the images of the incomplete single woman and the fulfilled married mother, the construction of black feminine sexuality in the novel produces conflicting discourses of exclusion, which leads to internal conflicts and estrangement for the female subject. By exposing multiple and conflicting versions of black female sexuality as intertwined, the narrative highlights the multi-layered structure of gender exclusion and labeling. The media young black women are exposed to such as *Sepia*, *Tan*, *Time Confessions*, *Real Romances* and *Jet* portray a male-oriented and demeaning image of women who are defined solely by their sexuality: “According to these magazines, woman was a mindless body, a sex creature, something to hang false hair and nails on” (*Ibid.*, 65).¹⁴ Walker contradicts this socially imposed position of women with Meridian’s own experience as a female who has never been informed or warned about sex-related matters:

Later on she would frown even more when she realized that her mother, father, aunts, friends, passers-by—not to mention her laughing sister—had told her nothing about what to expect from men, from sex. Her mother never even used the word, and her lack of information on the subject of sex was accompanied by a seeming lack of concern about her daughter’s morals. Having told her absolutely nothing, she had expected her to do nothing (*Ibid.*, 54).

The contrast between the sexually-defined black woman perpetuated by the media and the expected ‘morality’ of the family constructs an exclusively dual portrayal of female sexuality. In their analysis of molar segments, which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, refer to easily categorizable and defined sections of social strata, Deleuze and Guattari underline the “dualistic organization” of molar segments, which are arborescent and thus dichotomous (2005: 222). By being forced to fit two contrasting and mutually exclusive images of black womanhood, Meridian occupies a schizo position since her own understanding of sexual intercourse is shaped by a third viewpoint. In a similar manner to *Yellow Sun*, *Meridian* depicts sexual intercourse as a metonym for sanctuary of the madwoman. However, the comparison

¹⁴ Paula Giddings draws attention to the male-oriented nature of the media in postwar era in both white and black communities, the latter influenced by the former: “Black magazines like *Ebony* and *Jet*, with articles entitled “Do Career Women Make Good Wives?” or “Do Working Women Make Good Wives?” or “Do Pretty Women Make Good Wives?” were not only male-oriented but beside the point” (2007: 224). The male-oriented media played into the perpetuation of patriarchy in the already chauvinistic postwar period.

of two women requires a more complex interpretation of sex as a form of sanctuary. Olanna, educated, independent and affluent, follows a rhizomatic direction of desire, through which she defines herself without depending on the male partner. On the contrary, Meridian uses sex not as a way of self-actualization but as a refuge from it: “She could make male friends only when she was sexually involved with a lover who was always near—if only in the way the new male friends thought of her as “So-an-so’s Girl.”” (*MER*, 56). Her experience of intercourse does not aim to create an authentic bond with her partner, but an escape from all men. As the narrator points out in different periods of her life, her experiences of sexual intercourse are devoid of pleasure: “She was suspicious of pleasure. She might approach it, might gaze on it with longing, but retreat was inevitable” (*MER*, 62). Contrary to Olanna whose experiences of sexual intercourse is described in an explicit and assertive tone, Meridian’s one-sided intercourse, entrapped by the arborescent view of male and female roles where one of the parties exerts power over the other, is narrated through euphemisms such as “being sweet.” Even the chapter exploring her sexual intercourse is named “English Walnuts,” creating a double-layered discourse of sexual suppression and silencing that reflects the values of the era. Ironically, Deleuze and Guattari claim that “Pleasure is an affection of a person or a subject; it is the only way for persons to “find themselves” in the process of desire that exceeds them; pleasures, even the most artificial, are reterritorializations” (2005: 156). The refusal of the narrative to reach interiority through exteriority, that is, creating love out of corporeal interaction rather than reaching from a rhizomatic dialogue to corporeal pleasure, impedes the possibility of ‘reterritorialization’ into the community.¹⁵

Not only does Meridian’s schizo position uncover the myth of the promiscuous black women but also disassociates it from its dichotomous relation to black motherhood through a process of negation of textual signification. In his discussion about intertextuality, Allen utilizes Roland Barthes’ definition of text as a “multi-dimensional space” in an attempt to express the multi-dimensional potential

¹⁵ This superficial understanding of ‘finding oneself through sexual intercourse’ can be seen as an early indication of Meridian’s madness, which defies any understanding of transformation based on exteriority.

of comparative analysis (2000: 13). Exploring the same time period within two distinct cultural contexts, *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* provide a multi-dimensional space of textual relations with regard to the denotative and connotative dimensions of sexuality and motherhood. *Yellow Sun* depicts the experience of sexual intercourse in a multiplicity of meanings for various characters. Yet among this multiplicity, the novel describes Olanna's intercourse—the “selfishness” of her act—as “redemptive” and liberating (*YS*, 232). In opposition to this positive connotation the novel attributes to sexual intercourse even in an act of betrayal, the narrative defines marriage as “prosaic” and “monotonous” in Olanna's eyes (*Ibid.*, 49). Through the omnipresent and fractured narrative, the novel underscores the plurality of meaning and interrelation between the individual and community as well as the concept and its praxis. The contrast between the connotations of sexuality and marriage/motherhood presented in the black female subject and the collective consciousness negates the sexual act as a signifier for marriage and motherhood. On a similar note, *Meridian* disrupts the monolithic lexical and conceptual associations of sexuality and motherhood through the gap between the individual and society. As in *Yellow Sun*, the narrator creates multiple meanings of sexuality and motherhood thanks to its omnipresent nature. In an era that celebrates and encourages marriage and motherhood, *Meridian's* experience of both is described through silence, associations with death and displacement.¹⁶ Unlike the positive descriptions of Olanna, she is portrayed “sourfaced” and takes her first glimpse at it at a funeral house (*MER*, 54). The negative imagery and setting emerging out of *Meridian's* sexual intercourse disrupts the promiscuous connotations of black female sexuality. The collective consciousness in the novel presents institutions of marriage and motherhood, or molar aggregates, to be the antidote for the image of promiscuous black woman.¹⁷ Yet the narrator subverts the dichotomous correlation between these

¹⁶ Giddings points out the common experience of motherhood in the postwar era. Joining the baby boom fad, black women were “having more babies than any previous period, averaging four per family, the highest complete fertility of any group since the decade following the Civil War” (2007: 214). By portraying *Meridian* as an unwilling mother, Walker questions the idealization and desirability of motherhood.

¹⁷ Comparably, bell hooks draws attention to the correlation between motherhood and the desire to avoid sexualized portrayals of black womanhood. In *Ain't I a Woman*, she argues that the systematic

two concepts since Meridian has not “once been completely fulfilled by sex” and is “disgusted with fecundity of her body that got pregnant on less screwing than anybody’s she had ever heard of” (*Ibid.*, 106). The combination of creative and destructive—liberating and restrictive—representations of sexuality and motherhood in both novels defamiliarizes the link between sexual intercourse and motherhood as a fixed meaning of signifier and signified. The structural parallelism between the two literary works that dissociate a closed and fixed system of signs from black female sexuality creates an exchange of plural meanings and viewpoints through textual interconnectedness and the refutation of fixity.

The satirical representation of Meridian’s maternal experience, in contrast to the celebration of this feminine space by society, diversifies the monolith of black motherhood. Her marriage and pregnancy contest the maternal glorification of the era. Instead of being a source of regeneration and inner peace, her maternal status evokes the desire to kill herself or her baby. Whereas the narrator reveals the celebration of her maternal experience by society, the focalization of Meridian depicts pregnancy as a ‘disease’, which urges feelings of anger and helplessness. Even though her inner thoughts are haunted by her ancestry where slave women were devoid of the right to keep their babies, Meridian perceives motherhood to be slavery: “So this, she mumbled, lurching toward his crib in the middle of the night, is what slavery is like. Rebelling, she began to dream each night, just before her baby sent out his cries, of ways to murder him” (*MER*, 63). Ironically, unable to entertain the idea of killing her own son, Meridian turns into an ‘exemplary mother’ only after her life is comforted by the possibility of suicide, equating motherhood with death: “Because of her growing reliance on suicide, the thought of it, she was able to function very well. She was told by everyone that she was an exemplary young mother, so mature, so calm” (*Ibid.*). Here, Walker hints at the similar experiences of two different black female subjectivities. Mrs. Hill is also portrayed to be the perfect mother from outside, for her children are always ‘spotless’. The similarity between the maternal experiences of the two women indicates that the frustration that comes

devaluation of black femininity led black women to take refuge in motherhood in an attempt to prove “they were women whose lives were firmly rooted in the family” (1999: 70).

with motherhood is not exceptional to *Meridian*. Moreover, by naming the chapter of *Meridian*'s inner crisis of failed motherhood "The Happy Mother," Walker underscores the gap between socially accepted and imposed behavior and *Meridian*'s experience. It also challenges the validity of external images. This gap between the perfect, exemplary mother and the suicidal, murderous inner world of *Meridian* and Mrs. Hill disrupts the glorification of motherhood of the era. The satirical and deadly representation of motherhood is, thus, posited as a mirror that uncovers the tension between the individual and the collective.

The novel associates *Meridian*'s sense of guilt and exclusion not with the in-betweenness of her desires and socially accepted female roles but with her resistance to fit them. Deleuze and Guattari propound that rigid segmentarities such as socially defined roles like men and women are "always expressed by the Tree" which is "the knot of arborescence or principle of dichotomy" (2005: 212). Similarly, *Meridian*'s role as a mother is arborified and dichotomized against 'men' or someone-other-than-female, as each molar segment exists within a homogenous structure. Her decision to give her son for adoption and attend college after her divorce creates a series of contestations that necessitate an alternative view of black womanhood and motherhood. Mrs. Hill, a woman whose only rebellion to the sexual politics of her society is the frustration and grudge she keeps inside, judges *Meridian*'s 'selfish' choice based on the ideal image of motherhood. *Meridian*'s challenge to the arborescent view of motherhood is regarded as monstrous. "You should want Eddie Jr.," Mrs. Hill claims, "Unless you're some kind of monster. And no daughter of mine is a monster, surely" (*MER*, 81).¹⁸ Walker utilizes Mrs. Hill to mirror the sexist-defined roles of the 50s. As hooks argues, in a Victorian-like atmosphere of the period where black women were socialized to conform the sexist norms, black mothers taught their daughters that "they should not be proud to work, that they should educate themselves in case they did not find that man who would be the most

¹⁸ Mrs. Hill's internalized sexism reminisces Mama's sexism in *Yellow Sun*. As maternal figures, both oppose the female character who dares to transcend the exclusive interpretations of femininity. Just as Mama who favors Amala, an uneducated village girl, Mrs. Hill brings up Nelda, their neighbour who stands out with "her meek acceptance of her family's burdens" to exemplify the ideal femininity (*MER*, 80). Both novels include ambivalent sexism of maternal figures in the construction of their mad characters.

important force in their lives” (1999: 184). In a similar vein, Giddings analyzes the inculcation of Victorian values in the postwar era. As she states, women in the 50s were told “careers, assertiveness, and higher education were dangerous chimeras” (2007: 215). *The Lost Sex* by psychiatrist Marynia Farnham and sociologist Ferdinand Lundberg warned about the dangerous consequences of higher education such as the masculinization of women whereas Phillip Wylie’s *A Generation of Vipers* defined such women as narcissistic ‘female monsters’ who drew the independence and strength of their husbands and sons away from them (*Ibid.*). Acting against the norm, Meridian is “the only one that thinks you [she] can just outright refuse [motherhood]” as it is, being a female, her responsibility (*MER*, 80).¹⁹ Offering two polarized approaches to imposed motherhood, the novel disrupts the ‘single unity’ of the arborescent categorization of maternity. Moreover, the connotation of unwilling mothers with monstrosity and abnormality echoes *Yellow Sun*’s depiction of stigmatized barren woman. In relation to one another, both texts construct a series of negative maternal imagery inflicted by the ‘rational’ mass and transform this negativity into a potentially creative zone of madness.

The novel questions the demarcation between social inculcation and its internalization even by the ‘rebels’ through the unification of formerly divided focal points. Just as Olanna both rebels and cannot cleanse herself of guilt and incompleteness, Meridian’s rejection of motherhood is confronted with her internalization of socially accepted gender roles. Both novels juxtapose the external judgment of society with the inner world of the madwoman, blurring the line between the self and the Other. Eddie, Meridian’s former husband, is free from any paternal responsibility: “He assumed, naturally, that the baby would remain with her (this was, after all, how such arrangements had always gone” (*Ibid.*, 65). In *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler points out the different range of acceptable behavior for men and women. As women are more confined to the role-sphere than men, Chesler declares, women’s resistance against these roles tend to be seen as more

¹⁹ Quoting Letherby’s observations, scholar Enza Gandolfo analyzes the unequal treatment between the involuntarily childless woman and voluntarily childless woman. Since maternal yearning is believed to be ‘innate’ and ‘natural’, the infertile woman receives pity while the latter is perceived to be a ‘selfish’ woman with ‘abnormal’ choices (2005: 112). Thus, the labeling is determined by the mother’s intention, not by the reality of her body.

unacceptable and “ill” (1972: 39). However, as the novel creates an internal necessity for transformation and questions the validity of exteriority, Meridian’s gradual madness goes beyond the ways she is perceived by others and reaches the depth of her self-perception. It is not the voice of others but her own that haunts her:

A voice that cursed her existence—an existence that could not live up to the standard of motherhood that had gone before. It said, over and over, until she would literally reel in the streets, her head between her hands: Why don’t you die? Why not kill yourself? Jump into the traffic! Lie down the wheels of that big truck! Jump off the roof, as long as you’re up there! Always, the voice. Mocking, making fun. It frightened her because the voice urging her on—the voice that said terrible things about her lack of value—was her own voice. It was talking to her, and it was full of hate (*MER*, 84-5).

By creating an alternative path of black motherhood that prioritizes well-being over possession—as the narrator repeatedly claims Meridian wishes for a better future for her child where he is accepted and wanted—the novel rejects the filiation of the arborescent system and takes on a rhizomatic direction. Nonetheless, this alliance-based understanding of femininity clashes with Meridian’s perception of history and black slave motherhood. Maintaining the dichotomous conceptions of history and femininity thwarts the potentiality of her escape from the exclusive arborescent frame of reference.

Within the multi-focal points and fractured narration, *Meridian*, reminiscing *Yellow Sun*, reveals a world of many miniature worlds that are intertwined and interlocked in their insistence on binary oppositions and concomitantly, exclusion. The exterior differences of socially-defined segments such as family, schools, church or the state are deconstructed and molecularized through their shared basis of arborescence. In their discussion of the molar segmentarity, Deleuze and Guattari regard these rigid segments as an “interplay of well-determined, well-defined territories” (2005: 195). The values of Meridian’s family, virginity, morality, Christianity as well as the spiritual and corporeal cleanliness of the black female are presented as well-determined aspects of various social institutions, connecting the discourse of exclusion and inculcation of one-dimensionality with other molar segments. Meridian’s college experience, starting as an act of resistance to the expected roles of femininity, throws her further into the psychological degeneration.

The euphemism of “sweet” girl in Meridian’s family is reconstituted in Saxon with the imagery of “driven snow.” Saxon College, the narrator declares, is surrounded by beautifully ornamented fences that do not seem to “contain or exclude” from a stranger’s point of view, “Only the students who lived on campus learned, often painfully, that the beauty of a fence is no guarantee that it will not keep one penned in as securely as one that is ugly” (*MER*, 35). Here, the students are taught the arts of ‘true ladyhood’. Learning how to make French food, English tea and German music, most of them are “timid, imitative, bright enough but never daring” (*Ibid.*, 33).²⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, Deleuze and Guattari define the danger of each line. They argue that once a person tries to transcend the molar segments of their identity, they are confronted with the fear of losing their security, which leads them to rigidify their segments further: “We reterritorialize on anything available; the only segmentarity we know is molar” (2005: 227). Since all Saxon girls are assumed to be ‘innocent’ virgins, Meridian’s act of resistance to the imposition of motherhood turns into an act of complicity, for she feels forced to hide her past experiences of marriage and motherhood. Both *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* emphasize the difficulty of giving up on one’s sense of security even if it thwarts one’s pursuit of subjectivity. Similar to Olanna who not only wants to be free of social restrictions but also is afraid of leaving no ‘tree’ to give her a sense of security, Meridian holds on to a false image of innocent virgin girl, rigidifying the formerly deconstructed portrayal of black femininity: “She needed this clean, if artificial, air to breathe” (*MER*, 35-6). Strict though it is, the narrative portrays Saxon as a means to “reterritorialize” and reconnect with the black womanhood from which Meridian is cut off. Thus, in parallel to the cyclical structure of the novel that weaves different power structures into one another, rebellion and submission are incessantly intertwined.

²⁰ Since Saxon College is the fictional representation of Walker’s first college, Spelman, the clear-cut values of Saxon mirrors Spelman. Her biographer, White argues that the aim of the college was to help their students become “good housemakers with strong religious convictions” (2005: 66). Walker’s teacher, Howard Zinn declares that students “were expected to dress a certain way, walk a certain way, pour tea a certain way” (qtd: in White, 2005: 88). Having an identical atmosphere with Spelman, Saxon serves as another form of oppression for the ‘deviant’ outsider who defies their definition of ideal womanhood.

Interestingly, both *Meridian* and *Yellow Sun* highlight the impossibility of the rigidification of their mad female characters. Olanna, feeling insecure about her position as a barren woman in a society that equals femininity with motherhood, fails to give birth to a child despite her constant attempts. Meridian, too, tries to belong to her community, in this case, Saxon College, through pretense and suppression of her true self. Ironically, the novel connects the imposing nature of Saxon College and Meridian's estrangement from her mother through similar moments that are embedded in exclusion, judgment and silence. Assuming an open-minded environment at her college, Meridian, in the chapel service all Saxon girls are to attend each morning, brings up her doubts about the existence of God, after which "when her fellow students found themselves near her afterward they would look about as if they expected lightning to strike, and her teachers let her know she was a willful, sinful girl" (*Ibid.*, 86). The exclusion and estrangement are highly connected to Meridian's memory of another church scene where she is cut off from her mother upon her refusal to confirm her belief in God. The silence permeating the above-mentioned scenes intertwines Mrs. Hill with Saxon through their "either/or" values. This schizo position on the periphery of her family and college creates a policy of silence and alienation in Meridian as "She began to have headaches that were so severe they caused her to stutter when she spoke. She dreamed of such horrible things she would wake up shaking" (*Ibid.*). Her hair begins to thin and her vision blurs. Comparably, Chesler attests that for a woman, to be "cut off" is worse than being verbally abused and is experienced as "psychic death" (2009: 246). Meridian experiences a psychic death as a price for her exploding the molar segments of black femininity. The rejection of her inner self by the external world leads to the degeneration of her body that has 'failed' to nurture motherhood or to keep its virginity. By underscoring the interconnection between different forms of institutional constructions of black femininity, Walker repeatedly draws attention to the multi-faceted roots of female madness.

The novel depicts Meridian's political life as an alternative to challenge and circumvent her alienation from black womanhood and motherhood. In a similar vein to Olanna who challenges her mother's authority through political activism, Meridian creates an escape route in the world of macropolitics. Ironically, the non-linear

narrative constructs Meridian's political identity in a conflicting relation to her socially imposed femininity. Her encounter with the Civil Rights activists coincides with her husband's abandonment in the chapter "The Happy Mother" where she becomes aware of "the past and present of the larger world" (*MER*, 67).²¹ Similar to *Yellow Sun*, *Meridian* positions the mad female within an inclusive political structure in contrast to the more traditional-driven subjectivities. Mrs. Hill, having an arborescent set of mind, is not able to make connections between different kinds of oppression, or oppressions of different ethnicities. When questioned about Indians, who are also an oppressed group, she utters: "As far as I am concerned those people and how they kept off mosquitoes hasn't got anything to do with me" (*Ibid.*, 23). Not having voted once in her life, she relies on the definition of the media regarding the Civil Rights workers: "The papers say they're crazy" (*Ibid.*, 77). The order of the chapters strengthens Meridian's counter-identity that the novel constructs against her mother and black motherhood since she considers Mrs. Hill to be "Black Motherhood Personified" (*Ibid.*, 88): "Clouds," "The Attainment of Good," and "Awakening." In the first chapter, Meridian is portrayed in a similar way to her mother, stuck in her duties to her baby whereas the last chapter explores Meridian's political awakening. The middle chapter covers Mrs. Hill's ideas on motherhood, her lack of interest in politics and her devotion to Christianity. As Meridian exchanges her mother's faith with her political activism, it reveals an alternative reaction to motherhood and a new perspective on black femininity. However, the novel does not take Meridian's 'awakening' beyond escapism. Instead of constructing a creative political consciousness, her activism is utilized to mask her self-hatred and guilt:

Only during a crisis could she forget. While other students dreaded confrontation with police she welcomed it, and was capable of an inner gaiety, a sense of freedom, as she saw the clubs slashing down on her from above. Only once was she beaten into unconsciousness, and it was not the damage done to her body that she remembered when she woke up, but her feeling of yearning, of heartsick longing for forgiveness (*MER*, 89).

²¹ The narrator declares that Meridian comes across Civil Rights workers in mid-April, 1960 - the exact time Ella Baker sponsored SNCC. Meridian's relation to SNCC will be examined in more detail in the analysis of her madness-oriented activism.

In his 1964 essay “What Price Freedom?” James Baldwin defines freedom as the knowledge of who you are even if it brings discomfort and suffering (2010: 94). By using activism as a means of forgetting about who she really is, Meridian’s political activism loses its creative potentiality and does not prevent her experience of madness. By portraying her activism as the perpetuation of self-hatred and misery, the novel refutes the authenticity of activism born out of escapism and demands a more comprehensive attitude toward political forms of expression, as only after the protagonist is willing/able to confront herself does her political protest serve as a real alternative and cure for societal restrictions.

Aside from the superficiality of Meridian’s political experience and its role on her madness, the novel interweaves the patriarchal exclusion of the movement into the previously mentioned exclusive familial and educational institutions, which can best be examined in Meridian’s relation to Truman, a black painter who accompanies her in activism from the Civil Rights to Black Power Movement. The interaction between the two uncovers the gender ‘myths’ surrounding the liberating movements of the 60s and 70s. In congruence with Olanna who is drawn to a revolutionary intellectual, Meridian, unlike women around her, yearns for a man with whom she can go beyond the limitations of the well-defined gender roles. The narrator contrasts her opinion of Truman with her former husband or any other men she knows. Earlier in the narrative, she critically regards all the males as ‘boys’ and not ‘men’ even if they grow older. Yet, Truman, with his political activism and constant speech in French, is “courageous” and “new,” “a man who fought against obstacles” (*MER*, 90). Similarly, Truman romanticizes Meridian as the ‘Saxon type’—an innocent, naive virgin girl. In connection with Mrs. Hill and Saxon College, the political activist black male, too, equates ideal womanhood with virginity: “He [Truman] wanted a woman perfect in all the eyes of the world, not a savage who bore her offspring and hid it” (*Ibid.*, 132).²² The narrative indicates, similar to Saxon College,

²² Truman’s attitude reveals the contradictions inherent in the black male perspective of the black womanhood, as the narrator points out “And yet, had she approached him on the street, dragging her child with her by the hand, he would never have glanced at her. For him she would not even have existed as a woman he might love” (*MER*, 132). Not only the woman who gives away her baby but also the loyal mother is rejected to be the ideal woman: “When he knew about the child he thought of

there is no room in the liberating movements for a female who is not a virgin, and worse, who rejects motherhood. Feeling related to Harriet Tubman, Meridian realizes a general is not wanted: “He did not want a woman who tried, however encumbered by guilts and fears and remorse, to claim her own life” (*Ibid*, 101). Instead, her femininity is contrasted with a white woman’s more ‘sophisticated’ subjectivity by Truman, who, oblivious to Meridian’s pregnancy, prefers the white woman activist, Lynne. Discussing the politics of recognition, scholar and philosopher Charles Taylor states that individuals define their identity “always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against,” the things their significant others want to see in them (1994: 33). The revolutionary black male is depicted as a hindrance to the socially rejected black female’s psyche. Through Meridian’s decision to have an abortion and have her tubes tied, the novel refutes the possibility of an offspring and subverts the glorification of quantity over quality.²³ As mentioned above, pleasure is considered to be a path for ‘reterritorialization’. Meridian’s rejection of sexuality is the rejection of re-integration into society. Moreover, her fixation on Truman’s definition of her identity and her dependence on him for self-worth draw a similar line of thought to Olanna’s dependence on Odenigbo for self-affirmation. In both novels, the black male subjectivity is entrapped in illusions of externally inflicted political and social reform. The gendered madness in both *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, therefore, constitutes a zone of internal transformation and self-affirmation without dependence on external forces including the black male revolutionary. The involvement of politics within the construction of the male subject in both texts creates a multi-dimensional set of textual references for the madwoman trope as the depiction of madness is created in contrast to this interconnected image of male subjectivity.

As all the molar segments that define and label black femininity construct a cacophony of exclusive rhetoric, their dissolution into micropolitics leads to the

her breasts as used jugs. They had belonged to some other man” (*Ibid.*). Through Truman, the novel sheds light on the hypocritical and contradictory rhetoric of the era.

²³ In an era where giving birth to ‘revolutionary babies’ is encouraged, Meridian’s choice of abortion contests the superficial solution of giving birth to babies and necessitates a re-examination of how and by whom these babies should be brought into world. The narrative rejects a black activist like Truman, who, as the saying of the period goes, ‘talks black, sleeps white’, as the right partner for such a decision.

rejection of the body and mind. Deleuze and Guattari, in their analysis of the dangers of the molecular line, or supple segmentation, warn about the ‘clarity’ it brings about, which breaks the molar segments into tiny molecules: “where just before we saw end points of clear-cut segments, now there are indistinct fringes, encroachments, overlappings, migrations, acts of segmentation that no longer coincide with the rigid segmentarity” (2005: 228). Experiencing the same labeling and judgment by family, educational and political institutions and by her potential revolutionary lover, Meridian’s perception of these molar segments is molecularized, which is reflected in the narrative. Through the flashback and foreshadowing of the non-linear structure and the rhizomatic order of the chapters, everything is narrated in the midst of everything else. This close-knotted narrative that at times reflects Meridian’s stream of consciousness offers each oppression as a part of the others in relation to her madness. The destruction of the molar segments and her exclusion from all definitions of black femininity bring about Meridian’s madness: “She realized the worry part of her brain had been the landslide behind her brows and that it had slid down and therefore no longer functioned” (*MER*, 110). She starts to take chances with her life such as visits to the dangerous areas for blacks. Comparable to Olanna with the paralysis of her legs and visions of Dark Swoops, she temporarily loses her sight, loses the function of her legs, gets blue and black spells and forgets to eat. Since *Yellow Sun*’s war setting leads Olanna to witness the brutalities of the war, her madness and the physical reaction to it are not in Olanna’s control. Contrary to Olanna, Meridian’s decision not to take care of her body does not result from a psychosomatic disorder due to a shocking event but from the gradual mental breakdown that is preceded by her expulsion from ideal womanhood and exposure to racial oppression. In *Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar offer a variety of interpretations for anorexia nervosa in the depiction of madwoman such as self-punishment, desire to take control of one’s body and refusal of what society regards as nourishing (2000: 390-1). On a similar note, the deterioration of Meridian’s body and mind reveals her condemnation of what her society regards as nourishing—the black female body—her self-punishment and hatred since her body creates a sense of unbelonging within the hierarchical and dichotomous molar segments of the black community. Therefore, *Meridian*, in close relation to *Yellow Sun*, exposes the

interconnectedness of various power structures of its community and how these structures shape, restrict and destroy the already divided black feminine psyche through its structural parallelism to *Yellow Sun*, which interweaves various social, cultural and political discourses and constructs relationality of meaning between intertexts.

2.3. Transforming the Self, Transforming the World: The Line of Flight and the Creativity of Madness

In their discussion of the constructed nature of sanity and insanity, Deleuze and Guattari proclaim that madness “need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough” (2000: 131). Excluding the title character from all acceptable definitions of femininity and political activism, *Meridian* portrays madness as the breakdown of these socially accepted and imposed segments. Deleuze and Guattari call this process of exploding of the molar and molecular segments ‘the line of flight’. However, both ‘breakdowns’ and ‘breakthroughs’ are inherent in madness as well as in lines of flight. This double-natured experience of madness opens up the paths of creativity and destruction for the subject. The novel, insisting on the need for internal change and a non-segmented basis for Meridian’s personal and political identity, explores the creative potentiality of her experience, which might turn the breakdown of black feminine psyche into a breakthrough. Through the non-segmented line of flight, Meridian’s madness transforms into a zone of recreation and redefinition of supposedly dichotomous structures of body-mind, femininity-masculinity, non-violence-revolution and the arborescent understanding of history. Thanks to Meridian’s experience of madness, the novel problematizes the black female subjectivity that is contingent on external definitions and instead, encourages a multivalent interpretation of femininity based on a non-segmented set of rhizomatic elements.

The novel connects the explosion of all segments that create Meridian’s world to a non-segmented discourse of body politics closely connected to the mind. The deadly experience of her madness has been mostly overlooked by scholars since her

constant physical paralysis has been exclusively analyzed within the dimensions of gender politics and political activism. In her introduction to *Madness in Black Women's Diasporic Fictions*, critic Caroline A. Brown provides a rich list of literary works by black women who engage with the depiction of gendered madness (2017: 14-15). Writers including Paula Marshall, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara and Alice Walker are listed with their novels. However, even though she mentions *the Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Brown does not include *Meridian* within the madwoman tradition. Although *Meridian's* precarious body has received divergent interpretations including the draining work of political activism and her messianic figure, her body and mental state have mostly been analyzed and interpreted separately by critics.²⁴ Yet, the aftermath of her psychological and physical breakdown requires the breakdown of the boundaries between the body and mind. The non-segmented basis of *Meridian's* madness defies any arborescent system of hierarchy or dichotomy. The novel disrupts the demarcation between exteriority and interiority through the constant exchange of *Meridian's* inner world and its external reflections on her body, which collapses after her performances of civil disobedience. When Truman expresses his confusion about *Meridian's* strength and instant physical collapse, she says, "I'm strong, actually. I'm just not Superwoman" (*MER*, 26). Her body reflects the rejection of the idealized black womanhood. Rather, it coincides with her mental desire to acknowledge her humanity. The constant circle of physical well-being and paralysis substantiates her inability and refusal to be 'perfect'. Within the context of her physical paralysis, she defines herself as "a woman in the process of changing her mind" (*Ibid.*, 19). The novel intertwines her physical paralysis and frequent collapses after she 'protests'

²⁴ In his analysis of bridge leadership, Robert J. Patterson interprets *Meridian's* paralysis as a side effect of the energy draining nature of political protest. He argues that *Meridian* can recover only after she gives up on her "messiah complex" (2013: 85). However, connecting her illness solely to her political activism misses the feminist critique of her experience of madness. *Meridian's* protest and subsequent paralysis serve as a detoxication of internalized racism and sexism. Examining her political protest and physical ailments within the scope of her madness conjugates horizontal and vertical lines of oppression and does not prioritize her racial subjugation over her gender-based oppression.

against the racist and sexist structures of power with her desire to change her mind.²⁵ Throughout the narrative, it is repeatedly pointed out that Meridian's 'voice' is disrupted by the social aggregates of her society. She is depicted to be silent during moments of exclusion and judgment. As she reaches a point where these social aggregates or molar systems explode and dissolve into non-segmentarity, Meridian releases the poison of arborescence inside her outward. Questioned by Truman about her health, she replies, "Of course I'm sick. Why else would I spend all this time trying to get well?" (*Ibid.*, 18). By portraying a hierarchy and dichotomy free relation between her body and mind, Walker utilizes Meridian's body as a way of un-silencing her past wounds and mediates the world of exteriority and interiority in a nonconformist demeanor. In this light, the madwoman's body subverts the textual construction of silence permeating the dominant gender ideologies of the period.

Through Meridian's madness as a line of flight, the novel does not only deconstruct the demarcation between the body and mind but also between male and female, creating a non-segmented dimension of black femininity. Discussing the arborescent binary basis of the sexes, Deleuze and Guattari state that "the tree has implanted itself in our bodies, rigidifying and stratifying even the sexes" (2005: 18). The postwar American society that shapes Meridian's subjectivity is determined by clear-cut definitions of femininity and masculinity. As opposed to the proper feminine image, Meridian's schizo position breaks down the molar segments of male and female and holds a new space of heterogeneous and molecularized femininity. Even though she is constantly held insufficient and unacceptable for the true ladyhood in the 60s, the opening chapter of the novel portrays her in dungarees with no hair, wearing a visored cap, "of the sort worn by motormen on trains" (*MER*, 14). This masculine-looking image is the first image the reader is exposed to and it is later constructed against the norms of the black femininity imposed by the community. In a flashback, Meridian's friend, Anne-Marion gets scolded in Saxon for wearing jeans and cutting her hair, which turns her into an "oddity" (*Ibid.*, 33). Due to the non-linear narrative that reveals Meridian's present self first, her non-segmented

²⁵ As Meridian recovers from her physical ailments only after she is psychologically well and strong enough not to be affected by societal labeling, the novel once again hints at the need for an internal transformation and recovery before any external change.

femininity becomes the lens through which the Victorian philosophy of Saxon College is perceived and constituted. The opening scene of Meridian's unladylike self, thus, deconstructs the unity and superiority of the one-dimensional construction of femininity. Just as the rhizomatic structure of the narrative where everything is connected, Meridian's choice of clothes connects the female body to the larger structure of racial and gender politics. Wearing the jeans of the SNCC uniform, Meridian responds back to the arborescent hierarchies of class and gender. In "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress," scholar Tanisha C. Ford attests that SNCC women wore denim and natural hair "to transgress a black middle-class worldview that marginalized certain types of women and particular displays of blackness and black culture" (2013: 626). It also helped SNCC women desexualize their bodies and blur "prescribed gender roles and notions of feminine propriety" (*Ibid.*, 627). Ford draws attention to the formerly accepted image of black femininity which is based on white notions of respectability that was the shield black women wore in order to escape from the racial stereotype of immoral, promiscuous black woman. By portraying Meridian in the uniform of a movement that is considered dead in the 70s, Walker underlines the still existing impositions of black female respectability and refuses to use Meridian's body as a site of socially accepted, restrictive gender norms. Scholar Geneva Cobb Moore calls Walker's androgynous female characters who assume a male/phallic sovereignty "phallic maternal" (2017: 198). Moore regards Meridian as Walker's first female character who transforms from a passive, weak female figure into a strong, masculinized phallic maternal. However, this interpretation acknowledges the equation of femininity with passivity and masculinity with power, a dichotomous construction of difference. Deleuze and Guattari delineate a dichotomy-free, rhizomatic perspective of the two sexes:

It is no more adequate to say that each sex contains the other and must develop the opposite pole in itself. Bisexuality is no better a concept than the separateness of the sexes. It is as deplorable to miniaturize, internalize the binary machine as it is to exacerbate it; it does not extricate us from it. It is thus necessary to conceive of a molecular women's politics that slips into molar confrontations, and passes under or through them (2005: 276).

In a similar vein, *Meridian*'s androgynous portrayal does not perpetuate the cycle of hierarchical segments of the sexes. Her line of flight—or rupture as Deleuze and Guattari at times call it—negates the positive or negative associations of femininity and masculinity. Instead of adhering to an external system of signifiers, *Meridian* creates its own gendered associations and meanings. The title character does not become masculine; her androgyny frees femininity of its monolithic depictions of ladyhood, weakness and passivity.

The re-creation of *Meridian*'s femininity in a rhizomatic direction conjugates femininity with political protest. Both *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* question the monopoly of biological motherhood in an attempt to explore alternative experiences of motherhood which is not contingent on one's body or bloodline. Whereas Olanna challenges the normative mothering through her acceptance of her lover's daughter, *Meridian* politicizes motherhood. Having given her baby for adoption and preferred abortion for the other, she is portrayed as being stuck in the heaviness of the historical black motherhood. The political sphere gives her the opportunity to generate a rhizomatic alliance and not an arborescent filiation. Throughout the narrative, her political protest involves children regarding their physical and psychological development. The opening scene depicts her guidance of the children in Chicokema as opposed to the other passively watching adults. Likewise, she embraces a dead five-year-old boy who is drowned due to still existing unequal life conditions of whites and blacks: "The child's body was so ravaged, so grotesque, so disgusting to behold, *his own mother* had taken one look and refused to touch him" [my emphasis] (*MER*, 179). Within this alternative interpretation of the black feminine subjectivity, *Meridian* urges the politicization of motherhood and the feminization of political activism. The heterogeneous and inclusive depiction of female political protest serves as the deconstruction of formerly present segments of femininity and male-oriented political representation. Moreover, by portraying her protagonist as a 'fallen' and deviant mother/daughter/wife, Walker challenges the politics of representation. Who is the right female to represent the political struggle against racial oppression? Giddings, in her discussion about the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement incited by the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, underscores the important role Rosa Parks played as the 'right' person to be the perfect symbol

for the campaign. Quoting Edgar Daniel Nixon, who offered Parks to be the test case for the boycott, Giddings emphasizes Parks' 'morally clean' background (2007: 236). Through Meridian, an outsider considered to be a monster who has left her child and killed the other, Walker refutes the ideal image of political representability. Meridian's political protest becomes even a protest against her right to protest and to represent black motherhood and racial struggle.

Meridian strengthens the creative potential of madness by the new angle the title character is positioned toward the racial and gendered myths of the black man and the white woman. As mentioned earlier, the novel is made up of three main sections with multiple chapters. The second section "Truman Held" focuses mostly on the racial stereotypes of black masculinity and white femininity. Even though the section is named after Truman, the chapters also dwell on Lynne—the white activist and his former spouse. Unlike the first and third sections where the main concern is Meridian's experience of alienation, madness and subsequent recovery, she is almost nonexistent in the middle narrative. The representation of black femininity within the domestic and public spheres is replaced by the discourse of rape, racial abuse, white guilt and mythification of the other race. Meridian is depicted only as a ghostly, distant figure. This omission and narratorial distance alienate Meridian from the destructive nature of the racial and sexual conflicts present in the lives of Truman and Lynne, who are mostly unable to see the members of the other race as an individual. In the middle chapter of the section "Visits," Meridian's absence of any involvement within this exclusive discourse is revealed. As both Truman and Lynne engage in an unpleasant argument filled with insults of racial stereotypes in Meridian's backyard, she walks away thinking:

"The only new thing now," she had said to herself, mumbling it aloud, so that people turned to stare at her, "would be the refusal of Christ to accept crucifixion. King," she had said, turning down a muddy lane, "should have refused. Malcolm, too, should have refused. All those characters in all those novels that require death to end the book should refuse. All saints should walk away. Do their bit, then—just walk away (*MER*, 141).

The exclusively dualistic concept of difference between sexes and races are contextualized within the self-sacrificing asceticism of political or religious leaders.

The route for self-recovery is presented to be in the opposite direction to the politics of hierarchical difference. Lynne is entrapped in her incorrigible dependence on Truman's presence or a black man's love. Her sense of self is determined by another person's validation of it. Truman, too, is entrapped in the idealized images of black and white women he has created. Meridian's distance from the narrative in the middle section of the novel and her announcement of refusal to die brings the racial and gendered dimensions of the arborescent system together. By releasing the "flawed" protagonist of the triangle of black man, black woman and white woman, the novel depicts a life-affirming subjectivity that does not rely on external forces for self-actualization.

The rhizomatic nature of the political protest arising out of the gendered madness presented in the novel establishes the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement in a dichotomy-free cyclical unity. The heterogeneity generated by Meridian's madness subverts the clear-cut distinctions between the two movements and their arborescent-centered ideologies. The non-linear narrative of the novel merges them as points that are connected by Meridian's madness and blurs the line between their one-rootedness. The 'revolutionaries' are represented as an exclusive group based on conditional acceptance. Unless a person is willing to kill for the revolution, they are not accepted the struggle. The definition of the correct way of struggle for racial freedom depends on an exclusive, self-righteous view of violence. Similarly, the Civil Rights Movement in the novel reveals a one dimensional understanding of freedom. Whereas Black Power is dependent on the act of murder, the Civil Rights Movement necessitates a leader. The death of leaders equals the death of the struggle. The third section of the novel "Ending," begins with a satirical description of Meridian's attendance to King's funeral in 1968. Portraying the event through Meridian's mourning eyes, the narrator creates a sudden contrast between the mourning for the leader and the relief of the people who soon turn back to their cheerful selves: "Behind her a black woman was laughing, laughing, as if all her cares, at last, had flown away" (*MER*, 174). Ironically, the chapter reflects a vague conception of freedom as it is named "Free at Last," not specifying if it refers to the dead leader, or the struggle, or the people who no longer have to feel responsible for their freedom. Cultural and literary historian Sander L. Gilman also touches on the

racial discourse by the white majority with regard to blackness, freedom and madness where, one hundred years prior to the Civil Rights Movement, the freed slaves were represented and perceived to be idiots and lunatics (1994: 138). The comfort of ignorance and passivity presented in King's funeral is contrasted with the willingness of the revolutionaries to act. Quoting Lorraine Hansberry's claim that "the condition of our people dictates what can only be called revolutionary," hooks regards militancy as an alternative to madness (1992: 6). Defining the daily experience of the black community as "the realm of the insane," she underscores the willing ignorance of many people who avoid facing the realities of their status for fear of turning to militancy (*Ibid.*). The awareness of one's desperate state is, thus, associated with either madness or militant action. As the monolithic perception of political activism in both movements contributes to Meridian's madness, they are intertwined within a discourse of exclusion. By contrasting Meridian's political activism that defies violence and Messiah-oriented commitment, the novel invents a rhizomatic feminine space of political activism and transgresses the notions of dependency on one leader, the validity of murder and precariousness of the 'right' person to kill or follow.

Aside from the cyclic unity of the two movements, the novel reverts the notion of external transformation through political activism. As opposed to the privileged state of other Civil Rights activists such as Truman, Lynne and Anne-Marion, Meridian's madness posits her in a reciprocal need for individual and communal change. By merging the deterioration of Meridian's mental and physical health with her desire to go back to the South, the narrative demonstrates her madness as a rhizomatic, and not arborescent, site of otherness. In their analysis of the functions of madness, Davoine and Gaudillière claim that "madness challenges its interlocutor to find the place of otherness to which it can speak" (2004: 7). Surrounded by the poor black community of the South, Meridian is not positioned as the educated and privileged Northern activist. Instead, she "looked as if she belonged" (*MER*, 13). Even though she teaches the community about the importance of voting, the community also looks after her and serves as a means to understand herself and her origins. Meridian's madness reveals her otherness through the need to understand the poor black community in the South. Within the narrative, she is

portrayed as the only character who does not ask for privilege but for the disappearance of all privileges for all races, genders and classes. Other activists, Anne-Marion and Truman, yearn for the privileges they are deprived of without a main concern for the poor. Likewise, as mentioned earlier, Marable highlights the gap between the middle-class and the poor in the black community in the 70s where the poor were disillusioned with the movement and depoliticized. The voting percentage decreased from 57.6 in 1969 to 49 in 1976 (1984: 167). As the novel refutes all assumptions of superiority over the poor Southerners in Meridian's political protest, it mirrors what Deleuze and Guattari call "a universal minoritarian consciousness" (2005: 106). Rather than referring to a minority, minoritarian consciousness indicates a non-hierarchical and rhizomatic state of being. The experience of madness, thus, reveals the unequal power relations within the struggle and requires an egalitarian, reciprocal mentality for the individual and collective betterment and transformation.

The re-creation of the self through the re-creation of the community is further substantiated by the juxtaposition of little individual chapters that reflect Meridian's visits to various Southern outsiders. These short stories are presented in the last section of the novel "Ending" without an explicit connectivity. Meridian's madness is posited as a common denominator for otherwise unrelated experiences of these characters who are unaware of or uninterested in the politicization of their unheard voices. Each individual story carries traces of Meridian's experience of exclusion from the norms of black femininity and political activism. The humorous and satirical chapter "Treasure," narrates the story of an old black woman, Miss Margaret, who has never left her house and is disconnected from the world. Her younger sister phrases the story as "She's fat and black and seventy-two years old, and the first man she opened her legs to made her pregnant" (*MER*, 197). Having no clear knowledge of female anatomy, Miss Margaret confuses the pain of her wounded leg with pregnancy at the age of seventy-two. Her lack of awareness and her fear to be judged reminisce Meridian's younger self and her unpleasant sexual experiences. Similarly, the chapter "Pilgrimage" covers the story of a young girl in prison who has killed her baby, re-contextualizing Meridian's experience of motherhood with an alternative ending. Since Meridian's madness as a line of flight

defies arborescence and exerts a rhizomatic direction, the narrative also mirrors her non-segmented perception through these juxtaposed stories. When analyzing the features of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari touch on its tendency to create connections and heterogeneity: “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” (2005: 7). Moreover, by connecting to one another, each element changes in nature (*Ibid.*, 8). Given the fact that Meridian is accompanied by Truman in these visits, the combination of these stories that are concerned with virginity, motherhood, love and family, constructs a heterogeneous and amorphous narrative. Within this communal intersubjectivity, Meridian’s madness and concomitant political protest disrupt the vicious cycle of racial and gender oppression and engender a possibility for creative, heterogeneous feminine consciousness.

Similar to *Yellow Sun*, *Meridian* utilizes the depiction of gendered madness as a means to offer a feminized counter-history that questions the validity of the written, homogeneous and male-oriented conception of history. *Yellow Sun* posits Olanna’s experience of the war and subsequent madness as an alternative channel to the written history. Unlike the male characters Ugwu and Richard, Olanna is privileged to narrate the unseen and unheard experiences of girls and women. In a similar manner, Meridian’s madness bears witness to the unseen and unacknowledged sufferings of the unpolitical black female subjects. According to Deleuze and Guattari, politics that follows a rhizomatic path rather than an arborescent one is defined as “micropolitics” and it does not “envision classes, sexes, people, or feelings in at all the same way [as macropolitics]” (2005: 196). Olanna’s exposure to the brutal scene of the massacre of her relatives including her pregnant cousin and her shocking experience with the little girl’s head in the calabash diversify the otherwise monolithic recording of the Biafran experience. Similarly, *Meridian* exposes its title character to the unrecorded micropolitics of the Civil Rights Era. The opening chapter of the novel presents the 60s as “a decade marked by death” with a list of the names of the ‘important’ political activists or politicians from Martin Luther King to John F. Kennedy (*MER*, 27). By italicizing solely this section of the novel, Walker differentiates it from Meridian’s personal experiences and sets it as the formal, written documentation of the struggle for racial equality. Right after this

chapter, Walker positions “The Wild Child” as a counterpoint to the formerly mentioned list. Unlike the important political figures that passed away or were killed, Wild Child is devoid of any important affiliation with the ‘right’ race, class or gender. Of all the female characters explored in the novel, she is the most unfitting female to norms of black femininity. Homeless, unladylike and pregnant, the depiction of the Wild Child rejects the common notions of domesticity, sexuality and femininity. Interestingly, Meridian’s first sign of mental and physical collapse takes place when she sees the Wild Child. Her classmates find her “lying like a corpse on the floor” (*Ibid.*, 30). Therefore, Meridian’s body and psyche, both forming her madness, transform into a vessel for the resistance to forget the stigmatized or unknown deaths of the black female. The alternative history that Meridian’s madness transmits defies the monolithic conception of historical representation. As micropolitics arising out of a rhizome, the novel multiplies the portrayal of the unseen black female subjectivity. Similar to the Wild Child, the daughter of Truman and Lynne, too, is constructed in relation to the deaths of Martin Luther King or Malcolm X. As a child of a black man and white woman, Camara offers another black, or mulatto, femininity that is outside the norms of respectability. Her very existence rejects the separatist ideology of the Black Power Movement. Yet, the chapter Meridian comes to terms with the revolutionary spirit in a radicalized church is titled “Camara,” even though the content never mentions her. By naming Meridian’s transition from a self-sacrificing political activist to a life-affirming revolutionary, the narrative includes and embraces Camara within, and not against, the Black Power structure. Since the depictions of the Wild Child’s and Camara’s death are dispersed in all three sections of the narrative, Meridian’s madness disrupts the linear unity of history. The micropolitics of black femininity, instead, constitutes a cyclical unity of history, which knows no center or hierarchy. Hence, the non-segmented structure of the line of flight, portrayed in Meridian’s madness, re-creates the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement on a feminized and uncentered space.

Through the creative potential precipitated by the non-segmentarity of the line of flight, the cyclical unity of history in the novel entails a double-layered perception of the past and the present. Within the whole narrative, all the ‘past’

events, people, movements and values that are considered dead are continually merged and intertwined with the present. As the cyclical structure of history and the narrative requires continuous confrontation with what is deemed to be over, it establishes a reciprocal exchange between the past and the present. The present is constantly reshaped and reconstructed by the past, and the past is constantly reclaimed and re-contextualized by the present. The novel explores different approaches to this dual nature of history through various characters, most of which, if not all, are dependent on an arborescent system of thought. Meridian's initial attachment to the past leads to her mental and physical collapse, for it evaluates her present self within the maternal history of slavery. The tendency to interpret the past without acknowledging the present renders history as a burden. Truman presents a ghostly understanding of the past as "when things are finished it is best to leave" and "pretend they were never started" (*Ibid.*, 20). His lack of interest in things that are 'over' and his tendency to join whatever is popular at the time is characterized to be self-destructive. Similar to Meridian's over-signified view of history, his complete denial of it does not enact a creative outcome. Revolutionaries such as Anne-Marion regard history as a source for reversal of power structures and define non-violent protest to be "insensitive to history" (*Ibid.*, 16). However, the utilization of history for militant activism is not equivalent to a constructive understanding of the past. The narrative indicates the harm inflicted by the militants' superficial use of the past in the Saxon College scene where students, angered by the authorities of the college, destroy the Sojourner tree in an act of protest. Represented as the ancestral guidance and spiritual source for the black female, the destruction of Sojourner encompasses self-destruction. Meridian's madness functions as a nexus between the past and the present as it uncovers the hidden dynamism between the individual and the collective. The heterogeneous structure of the line of flight brings the past and the present together without creating a hierarchical connection between them as seen in Meridian's recreated self: "The new part had grown out of the old" (*Ibid.*, 206). Thus, the novel delineates a mutual dependency of the past and the present and stimulates an active interpretation of the past in molding the present without monopolizing one over the other.

Meridian, like *Yellow Sun*, contextualizes its depiction of gendered madness within a highly segmented and exclusive racial and gender politics. Set in the 60s and 70s of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement—a politically active period in like manner to *Yellow Sun*—the novel posits its title character in a turmoil of domestic and political discourse of exclusion. Providing a ‘multi-dimensional space’ of interpretation, relationality and connectivity, the comparative analysis of both texts creates a new paradigm for the portrayal of the madwoman in relation to the politics of historical representation and inclusion of peripheral black feminine subjectivity. In accordance with Adichie who re-contextualizes the ethnic conflicts and divisions of the present Nigeria through the exploration of another pivotal point in Nigerian history, Walker goes back to a movement that is considered dead in the publication year of *Meridian* in an attempt to shed light on the root of the conflicts and divisions permeating the era. Both texts apply the trope of the madwoman as a means of uncovering what goes unrecorded and unheard in the written documentation of their respective male-oriented cultural history. The schizo position of Olanna and Meridian breaks down the clear-cut distinctions of sexuality, motherhood, marriage and political expression. Through their experience of line of flight, both characters transgress the destructive potential of madness and utilize their experience to create a non-segmented viewpoint on what it means to be a black female in a patriarchal and ethnicity-oriented/racist society. Their line of flight releases them of the restrictions of dependence on external and dichotomous forces for the creation of the self and leads to internal change and transformation. The ‘madwoman’ becomes a zone of re-creation of the individual and then the collective. This unitary and creative line of flight in the analysis of both works reveals a mirror of the hidden dynamics of their societies and the breaking down of these dynamics for a more inclusive, rhizomatic and non-segmented construction of feminine subjectivity and communal intersubjectivity. Thus, the line of flight embedded in the madwoman trope prompts new ways of seeing, creating and making connections wherein new lines of inclusive heterogeneity can be drawn and welcomed between genders, races, literary works and disciplines.

CHAPTER THREE

DOMESTICITY AND MADNESS IN *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

The present chapter explores an alternative yet complementary representation of female madness in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) in an ongoing dialogue with the already analyzed literary depictions of female madness in *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*. Unlike these two novels, however, *Purple Hibiscus* reconfigures the intrinsic and creative dimension of gendered madness. Instead, it brings forth the destructive and extrinsic facet of madness as a chaotic feminized space. Within this divergent juncture of black femininity and psychic demise, the chapter propounds that the mad character of the novel, Beatrice, who is also known as Mama, problematizes the static and one-dimensional understanding of the madwoman trope through her conflicting adherences to Igbo culture, Igbo religion and Europeanized Christianity. Whereas the formerly analyzed novels present madness as a line of flight for the madwoman, where an inner journey is conducive to the transformation of the self as well as to the social, political and cultural critique, *Purple Hibiscus* portrays Beatrice's experience of madness as an ambiguous force mingled with destruction. The analysis of this dangerous version of female madness will be framed within the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the line of flight. As mentioned in previous chapters, the line of flight contains both creative and destructive forces. Thus, the present chapter aims to examine Beatrice's entrapment and her demand for exterior change without internal transformation in the framework of the line of flight as a black hole. In congruence with *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, which reflect the gendered experience of madness through a non-linear, fragmented narrative and ambiguous, multi-dimensional imagery, *Purple Hibiscus* exemplifies the multivalent nature of the black madwoman trope. Similar to earlier works, it reiterates the need for a complex and binary-free depiction of madness, which is a uniquely feminine space that might lead to individual and communal rebirth or destruction.

In an attempt to contextualize the polarized world of *Purple Hibiscus*, which is divided between the African traditionalists and Europe-loving African Christians, the first sub-section of the chapter will analyze the historical and cultural specificity

of the colonial Igbo experience with emphasis on Igbo women whose encounter with Christianity and concomitantly with colonialism brings forth complicated changes in their status as women in both public and domestic spheres. The second sub-section will explore the underlying forces of Beatrice's madness in the form of molar and dichotomous sections of different ideologies including culture, spirituality and sexuality. As in previous chapters, the liminal space that Beatrice occupies will be deconstructed through the analysis of her otherness in public and private domains. Whereas the second sub-section will focus on exteriority, the third sub-section will be based on interiority, shedding light on the ambiguous imagery of the figurines and blurred segments of Beatrice's inner world through the Deleuzoguattarian concepts of molecular segmentation and the line of flight. The destructive potential of line of flight will be utilized for the examination of the destructive outcomes of Beatrice's madness.

Narrating the story of a Catholic Igbo family, the Achike family in postcolonial Nigeria of the 1990s at the backdrop of military coups and corrupted government regimes, *Purple Hibiscus* traces a great variety of literary influences in and out of Nigeria and Africa. Due to its engagement with the colonial history and subsequent problems of clash of two distinct cultures and religions, its depiction of the political degeneration and chaos in postcolonial Nigeria and its reconfiguration of power dynamics within public and private spheres, many scholars have characterized the novel as part of various literary traditions of African writers. It is particularly in *Purple Hibiscus*' exploration of gender in the larger social and political context that the novel reveals a diverse intertextual structure. Critic Susan Z. Andrade draws attention to the differences between *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus* in terms of their literary heritage and range of influence. According to Andrade, despite the former's greater critical acclaim, *Purple Hibiscus* reaches further across cultures and traditions, which she calls neither Igbo nor Nigerian but rather Pan-Africanist for its point of departure (2011: 94).¹ Similarly, in her analysis of Adichie's works

¹ Andrade and many other critics specifically make a connection between Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) since both works underline the political tension of a newly independent nation from a gendered standpoint. However, aside from their similarities of the feminization of the national narrative, the comparison also

within the scope of Nigerian and African literature, critic Heather Hewett positions *Purple Hibiscus* in black women's literary tradition expanding Adichie's literary heritage from Dangarembga to Zimbabwean author Yvonne Vera and Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat (2005: 87). Doing so, Hewett argues, enables the reader to analyze the novel comparatively across transnational traditions and discursive contexts (*Ibid.*). Critic and writer Brenda Cooper, on the other hand, characterizes *Purple Hibiscus* as a text interwoven with the influences of three main literary works due to the holistic nature of the novel, which integrates Igbo culture with the Catholic ritual and men into gender politics: Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959), Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) (2013: 110). These influences create the necessity of a multi-layered examination of the convergent representations of national politics, gender specificity and postcoloniality in a complicated manner that is reminiscent of multifarious depictions of the female experience analyzed earlier in *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*.

Adichie's feminist standpoint and what it reveals about the gender politics of *Hibiscus* can be best framed and foregrounded within the context of Nigerian literary tradition and its treatment of black women's writing. As mentioned in the first chapter, Adichie is positioned in the third-generation Nigerian writers whose works challenge and concurrently complement the first and second generation texts that are mainly dominated by male writers regarding the topos of national and cultural identity shaped by the colonial past and the chaotic regimes of postcolonial Nigeria.² The very existence of gender politics in a Nigerian novel based on national and cultural identity brings into question what is categorized as Nigerian and African. In her 2012 TED talk which is published in the following year as a booklet, *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie underlines the negative baggage associated with the

contributes to the intertextual exchanges among black women's depiction of the madwoman. *Nervous Conditions*, too, portrays the psychic disintegration of the black female in a postcolonial society, which carries the double repercussions of patriarchal past and present.

² Nigerian literary critic and feminist Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi calls the leading texts of Nigerian literature "phallic" (1988: 60), and it is against this background that Adichie's representation of gendered cultural and national identity in *Hibiscus* needs to be analyzed and deconstructed, which in turn propounds the inclusion of the larger politics of gender and nationality within the depiction of black madwoman by female writers of Africa and African diaspora.

concept of feminism in Nigeria.³ Talking about her experience of promoting *Hibiscus* in the country, Adichie mentions how she is warned by a male journalist about her feminist stance, which is reinforced by a female academic who classifies feminism as un-African (2014: 8). Thus, *Hibiscus*, challenging the male authorship of the national and political discourse of Nigerian literature, reminisces Walker's exploration of gender dynamics at the political upheaval of the 60s and 70s in a literary age dominated by the Black Arts Movement. Similar to Walker, Adichie incorporates the gendered experience of her female characters into the formerly male-dominated representation of postcolonial identity and its various conflicts within the divide of African traditions against European values, Igbo religion against Europeanized Christianity and public space against domesticity. As Walker redefines African Americanness through her novel *Meridian* whose portrayal of black femininity goes against the masculine definitions of blackness, Adichie redefines Igboness and Africanness by creating a complex postcolonial world where the reader is exposed to the perspective of a fifteen-year-old girl, Kambili instead of the third-person omniscient narrative of the male-dominated literary texts. Even the opening line of the novel "Things started to fall apart at home" (*PH*, 9) is a reconstitution of the first-generation writer Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which narrates the story of a displaced Igbo man against the clash of Igbo tradition and colonization through an omniscient narrative. Adichie's novel merges the thematic similarity of Achebe's novel with the newly adopted first-person narrative and the non-linear, cyclic edifice of the storyline. These structural changes bring forth black female subjectivity and repudiate a monolithic and masculinized perspective of the colonial and postcolonial epochs. Interestingly, whereas Walker portrays the main character Meridian as the madwoman, Adichie skips her protagonist and portrays her mother, Beatrice, as the madwoman of the story. Hence, the chapter critiques the depiction of the madwoman in *Hibiscus* in comparison to *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* whose protagonists go

³ In the same speech, Adichie enunciates the stereotypical feminist image in Africa as follows: "You hate men, you hate bras, you hate African culture, you think women should always be in charge, you don't wear makeup, you don't shave, you're always angry, you don't have a sense of humor, you don't use deodorant" (2013: 9). Located within this cultural background, the depiction of the female experience in *Hibiscus* and its focus on the madwoman trope create a challenging feminine discursive context for multi-dimensional black female subjectivity.

through a positive inner journey of transformation. Unlike these two characters, *Hibiscus*' madwoman problematizes the creative potential of madness, or line of flight, the representability of silence and the clash between internal and external transformation that the experience of madness inadvertently brings about. In turn, Beatrice's often neglected characterization and her subtle presence in the novel on which the madwoman trope is based expands the intertextual structure of *Hibiscus* beyond different generations of male and female Nigerian writers and the black female diaspora. Her silenced experience of madness creates new connections within texts whose convergence evokes the need for a multivalent and dynamic representation of literary madness in general and black female madness in particular.

3.1. Colonialism, Christianity and the Relegation of Igbo Women

Set in the aftermath of the civil war *Yellow Sun* depicts, *Hibiscus* explores the inextricable link between the country's colonial past and its rigid segments of gender and national politics in post-independence. The novel's constant re-examination of the colonial power dynamics in relation to present-day Nigeria necessitates a succinct analysis of the advent of colonialism and Christianity, both of which have affected and shaped women's position in Igbo society. The Christian history in Nigeria presents differences among regions due to separated legislation of the North and the South.⁴ The Igboland, situated in southeast Nigeria, was exposed to Christianity by Portuguese traders in the fifteenth century. However, it is only in the second half of the nineteenth century that the missionaries became influential in the region in direct proportion to British colonial expertise, which reveals the link between

⁴ Many scholars have drawn attention to the different treatments the North and South received from the colonial powers. As the Christian conversion went hand in hand with Western education, southern Nigeria was more exposed to Christian missionary activities and their education as opposed to the Islamic North where the British rule restricted missionary activities for the preservation of Islamic culture prevalent in the region (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 128). This imbalance of missionary and Western exposure shaped and contributed to the ethnic, religious and cultural conflicts within the country.

Christianization and the colonization of the Igbo.⁵ Despite the variety of missionary groups in Igboland such as Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Roman Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission, the missionaries served not only as a confrontation with a new religion and culture but also as a sociopolitical mechanism of hierarchy between the natives and the newcomers, which substituted the cultural imperialism of the period.

Contrary to the Islamized population of the North, Christianity and the colonial education, legal and economic structures that precipitated its area of influence were overwhelmingly influential in Igboland where the Igbo demonstrated an openness and willingness to the social and political empowerment inaugurated by their adherence to Christianity. In turn, Christian missionaries of various groups and the imperial mindset of the colonial legislation utilized Western education as a means to inculcate and dominate the African consciousness.⁶ The inextricable link between Christian missionaries and the British colonial rule prompted the spread of Christianity and concomitantly, the standardization and prioritization of Western values. According to historians Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, two factors helped the spread of Christianity: a spiritual standpoint of the local rulers who hoped for a supernatural superiority over their local rivals by embracing the Christian God and a commercial standpoint that encouraged the attendance to missionary schools where the students would learn how to speak, read and write in English at a time of expanding British trade enterprise (2008: 87). In addition to the alleged communal advantages of conversion, F. K. Ekechi accentuates the individual motives of the Igbo youth who considered Christian conversion as a “protective shield” against the exploitative nature of the colonial administration that was less likely to instigate

⁵ In his analysis of the encounter between Christianity and African traditional religions, theologian Chibueze Udeani subdivides missionary activities in Igboland into three main periods: the contact of Christianity with Igbo people between 1857-1914, the period from 1914 onwards where different missionary groups competed for membership and power of influence and finally, from 1939 to 1964 where the national and indigenous churches accelerated (2007: 99). Exploring an extended span of Christian influence on Igbo culture, *Hibiscus* positions its characters in the turmoil of the clashes among these periods.

⁶ Quoting Father Shanaha, scholar F. K. Ekechi underlines the paramountcy of Roman Catholic missionaries in education around the Igboland: “If we go from town to town talking only about God, we know from experience much of our effort brings no result. But no one is opposed to schools” (1971: 113). Hence, the missionary schools that dictated Western values and worldview became the most efficient way to evangelize the natives.

problems for the newly converted Igbos since they were relatively protected by missionaries (1971: 106). Namely, the intertwined power dynamics between Christian missionaries and the colonial administration was perceived to be of interest to both the community and the individuals in Igboland.

Despite its pragmatic aspects for the locals, however, Christianity came as a Europeanized mindset which Chibueze Udeani regards as “a foreign religion” for the Igbo who hardly ever found in “Christian message a reference to their own problems, world-view, history or art” (2007: 78). According to Udeani, Christ’s mandate of “Go make disciples of all nations” was modified as “Go make Europeans of all nations” (*Ibid.*). Instead of a mutual exchange of ideas and values, the evangelization of the African was based on a monologue that dictated the superiority of Christianity that was exclusively European. This imposition of a new God that bore no resemblance or relatability to African life and worldview facilitated the expansion of British imperialism and the destruction of the traditional African society (*Ibid.*, 93). Framed within this unequal religious and cultural exchange, the Igbo customs were considered “evil” manifestations of paganism, superstition, and cruelty (Harmeit-Sievers, 2006: 115). Christian missionaries altered the religious and cultural institutions of the Igbo by means of conversion, which also equaled the Europeanization of the community. Deprived of their local gods and deities who played “constitutive roles in community identity” and created a sense of unity and belonging, the Igbo religious rituals were reduced to folklore without religious implications (*Ibid.*, 103). Therefore, the unilateral encounter between the Igbo and the European missionaries who were supported by the British colonial administration shifted the power dynamics of the locals and negated their religious values upon which their customs and daily lives were based, creating a missing link in their perceptions of indigenous history and a sense of cultural alienation.

Aside from the clash of African traditional religions and Europeanized Christianity, the advent of colonialism altered the trajectory of black femininity, which created an unbalanced shift from pre-colonial to colonial perception of African women’s agency and their sociocultural status. In their examination of the deterioration of Igbo women’s position in public and domestic spheres under the colonial rule, Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian and Susan Kingsley Kent assert that the

British arrived in Nigeria with their preconceptions of Africa, which were shaped by the medieval and Renaissance understanding of racial construction based on contrasts of light and dark, of good and evil (2012: 12). Creating a polarized image of the European and the African, they argue, the colonizers perceived blackness as a gendered and sexualized demarcation of difference where the African, specifically the African woman, was imagined to be promiscuous and uncivilized (*Ibid.*).⁷ Similarly, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmi analyzes the hierarchical structures of the colonial system in terms of gender politics, for she regards the colonial administration as sex-differentiated. Connecting the differentiative function of race and gender with the visual and physical prioritization of Western culture, she subdivides the colonial society into four groups where the European male and female are followed by the African male only to leave the African female, who represented a double-layered otherness through her blackness and femininity, as the most dispossessed of the colonized (2001: 122).⁸ This changing gender politics of colonial Nigeria contrasted with the social enforcement of the pre-colonial society where the women occupied the public space alongside their male counterparts. Exploring the differences between colonial and pre-colonial gender ideologies of Nigeria, Chima J. Korieh and Obioma Nnaemeka claim that the Igbo held an environment where women's mobility and individual capital accumulation were not completely thwarted by patriarchy since the women occupied an important role in economic, political and social affairs that contributed to the maintenance of harmony in the community (2011: ix). In like manner, American author Toni Cade Bambara contrasts the European obsession with

⁷ Among various ethnic groups of Nigerian women, Igbo women became the most evident mark of differentiation: "Igboland represented the most extreme, the most intractable characteristics of femininity as westerners understood it. Everything about the Igbo people—the climate in which they lived; their purported savagery and lack of culture; the discrete and scattered nature of their social and political organization—all these carried for Britons a particularly gendered and highly sexualized set of meanings" (Matera et al., 2012: 45). Therefore, it is inevitable to see a more tangible transition from the pre-colonial independence of Igbo women to their suppression in the colonial era.

⁸ Accompanying her mining engineer husband to Nigeria, a European woman, Mrs. Horace Tremlett, describes the male-dominated atmosphere of the colonial Nigeria as follows: "I often found myself reflecting rather bitterly on the insignificant position of a woman in what is practically a man's country . . . If there is one spot on earth where a woman feels of no importance whatever, it is in Nigeria at the present day. She is frankly there on sufferance" (qtd. in Callaway, 1987: 5). As European women were still privileged over the African men and women, this observation strengthens the relegation of Igbo women who occupied the bottom of the hierarchical structure of the new system.

property as the basis of social organization and Christianity, “a religion fraught with male anxiety and vilification of women,” with the African view of women who were neither superior nor inferior but “a sharer of policymaking and privileges” (2005: 126). Not only did the advent of colonialism and Christianity, thus, create a sense of cultural alienation and a major break with one’s religious past but also brought about the gender-based dichotomy for Igbo women whose mobility was thwarted by the rigidification of gender roles.

The standardization and imposition of British legal, economic and social structures which were based on a politics of gendered exclusion created a new system of governance and encouraged the masculinization of public and the feminization of domestic spheres. The domestication of the African woman came through the highly valued education system of Christian missionaries whose education goal for women was to make good wives and mothers out of them via what they called “domestic sciences” that contained household management, child-rearing, sewing and religious work (Matera et al., 2012: 41). Wifhood and motherhood were not seen as only one of many aspects of the Nigerian woman but the sole definition of her identity. Even the assertion of citizenship was defined through marriage which was regarded as the “wifization of citizenship” (Oyěwùmí, 2001: 128). The colonial insistence on keeping women in the domestic sphere did not match the values and gender ideologies of pre-colonial Igbo society which, unlike the colonizers, did not have a rigid understanding of gender roles that divided human experience into spheres and welcomed women’s activities in the public sphere.⁹

After the application of British indirect rule in 1906, women’s position in the political institutions was negated since the colonial administration recognized only male chiefs and masculine institutions for political expression. The Native Courts which were the newly established units of colonial administration were exclusively male-oriented (Chuku, 2009: 88). The implementation of native warrant chiefs to

⁹ As Ifi Amadiume points out, in pre-colonial Igbo community, a non-industrious woman was to lose her senior, thus superior, status to a junior but enterprising co-wife as there were social and political rewards for the economically successful women in the title system (1987: 66). Scholar Gloria Chuku also asserts that the concept of a full-time housewife was unknown to the Igbo (1995: 39). The exclusive enforcement of the domestic space, thus, was a European re-creation of the Nigerian gender ideologies.

actualize British indirect rule was male-oriented. Women, as with all the other newly formed manifestations of power, were denied warrants altogether and their opinions were not included in the selection of warrant chiefs, which created a lack of direct communication between the native women and the colonial administration (Matera et al., 2012: 35). The relegation of titleholder women clashes especially with their former high status both among men and women of their villages as some female leaders in pre-colonial Igbo society could own titles and were respected by the community. Called “umuada” or “umuokpu,” these women could settle internal disputes and stop wars (Afigbo, 2011: 8). Having lost the chance to exert their authority over the affairs of their community, women were further thrown into the domestic sphere. Deprived of the proper education required for the new technologies that came with the British rule, women were also not favored in the economic system since the African men were prioritized as the colonial subjects with access to “land, extension services, high-yielding palm seedlings, fertilizer, demonstration farms, oil presses, kernel crackers, pioneer oil mills, cassava graters, loans, and other innovations” (Chuku, 2009: 89). In the new economic policy, the feminine space was taken over by the males, leaving women only the domestic space to maintain their social positions.¹⁰ The dispossessed state of Igbo women within the colonial political, economic and religious domains exacerbated their experience as colonial subjects. Framed within this history of gendered displacement, *Hibiscus* brings into surface unresolved conflicts that, according to many feminist scholars, still affect the collective definitions of what it means to be a Nigerian, or an Igbo woman in a postcolonial country whose gender ideologies are closely intertwined with the remnants of its colonial power structures.

¹⁰ One of the most overt manifestations of Igbo women’s desire for self-expression and their dissatisfaction with the misogynist British indirect rule is the Woman’s War, or the *Ogu umumwaanyi*, which took place in Abba in 1929 as a reaction against women’s displacement from the trade system. As Matera et al. argue, the war is called the Abba Riot by the British in an attempt to efface the violent outcome of women’s rebellion that caused more than fifty women’s death by British troops. Furthermore, the war invoked the old stereotypes of the African as rude, uncivilized and childish (2012: 4). This negative image of the Igbo women who fought for social and economic equality was used as a justification to exert violence and domination over the natives.

3.2. “Fleeing from Flight”: The Christian Rhetoric and the Silencing of Black Female Subjectivity

Carrying the traces of a pre-colonial past that contains the cultural and religious clashes of civilizations at the backdrop of a modern Nigerian family, *Hibiscus* sheds light on the postcolonial experiences of various characters of multifarious social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Among the cacophony of these experiences, Beatrice’s presence creates a textual construct of silence, often looked over as the depiction of the stereotypical battered African woman. Contrary to Western feminist fiction and criticism that conjugate female madness with patriarchal oppression and domination, however, *Hibiscus* offers a multi-layered structure of power that encompasses the impact of colonial imperialism as well as patriarchal subjugation of the African women. In her examination of African women’s writing, Gina Wisker underlines this complexity of the African woman’s postcolonial experience where “escaping from husbands and patriarchy” is not the remedy (2000: 133). Similarly, Nigerian feminist Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, echoing Mao Tse-tung’s four mountains analogy of the Chinese, claims that the African woman has six mountains on her back: one is oppression from outside such as colonialism and neo-colonialism; the second is oppression from traditional structures; the third is her backwardness; the fourth is man; the fifth is her color and race whereas the sixth is herself (1993: 131). According to Ogundipe-Leslie, the most important one of these mountains is the sixth one, the negative and self-defeating image that the African woman has for herself.¹¹ Even though *Hibiscus* shares similarities with *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* with regard to their challenge against the monolithic equations of female subjugation and self-actualization, Beatrice’s absence and silence in the narrative contrast with the narratorial dominance of Olanna and Meridian as the madwoman of their stories. In this light, Beatrice is portrayed as a madwoman who carries all of the six mountains mentioned

¹¹ In this light, *Hibiscus* goes beyond the boundaries of its national origin and reveals similarities with the African American women’s writing. The internalization of the hatred and inferiority reflected onto the black women from outside connects Beatrice’s troubled psyche with African American characters such as Celie in *the Color Purple* and Pecola in *the Bluest Eye*.

above and thus refuses to be demystified and deconstructed. Despite her overt absence and silence in the narrative, her experience of madness is transformed into a locus of religious and cultural tension which brings about questions of heterogeneous identity for the postcolonial subject. Surrounded by the molar segment of Christianity that is highly imbued with Europeanization, Beatrice's madness abnegates and problematizes the possibility of one-dimensional femininity and the relation of alleged fixity between referential points that occupy the rhetoric of exclusion in the narrative. Through Beatrice's subtle experience of madness, Adichie blurs the line between exteriority and interiority, which not only deconstructs the monolithic discourses of religion and culture in the novel but also diversifies the depiction of the madwoman in black women's writing.

Beatrice's muted presence and her concomitant madness, reflected in the non-linear and cyclic structure of the narrative, challenge the patriarchal and Europeanized Christian discourse permeating the story. The novel has four main sections that are respectively named "Breaking Gods," "Speaking with Our Spirits," "The Pieces of Gods," and "A Different Silence," all of which have in turn subheadings called "Palm Sunday," "Before Palm Sunday," "After Palm Sunday," and "The Present." Even though the story engages with Christianity and is highly shaped by the colonial encounter with the missionaries, which is explored in the previous section, the linear order of events is named after Palm Sunday and days related to it only in the form of subheadings, prioritizing instead the un-Christian titles of the sections such as "Breaking Gods," which suggests more than one God, which is a crucial constituent part of the Igbo belief system in opposition to Christian doctrines. Despite having Kambili, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Beatrice, as the limited narrator of the novel, Adichie mainly explores Eugene, Beatrice's Europeanized and religious fanatic husband in a monolithic patriarchal discourse. The main titles of the novel, thus, contradict with the heavily Christian content of the story. Beatrice's almost nonexistent presence and her muted experience of madness are henceforth centralized through the cyclical presentation in the novel. "Breaking Gods" and "Pieces of Gods" which are shorter sections that envelop the main section of the novel "Speaking with Our Spirits" are directly related to Beatrice since the 'breaking' of the title coincides with the breaking of her ballet-dancing figurines.

Disrupting the linear dominance of the masculinized narrative, the cyclical structure brings Beatrice's muted experience onto the foreground.

The centrality of Beatrice's madness and its resistance to the monolithic definitions of Christianized Igboness are further emphasized through the importance of cyclic continuity of time in traditional Igbo religion and culture, where the linear understanding of time is considered profane whereas the cyclic view of time is claimed to be sacred (Udeani, 2007: 28). In traditional Igbo religion, as opposed to Christianity, there is no idea of eschatology where "all will go to eternal God for judgment" (Okeke et al., 2017: 4). Instead, the Igbo believe in the cyclical continuity of life in the form of reincarnation which is available to the ones who had good lives, not the ones who departed "from the moral code of the clan" (*Ibid.*). By putting Beatrice's madness at the heart of the cyclical narrative in opposition to the patriarchal linear construction of Eugene's story, Adichie redefines the moral code of Igboness.¹² She, then, creates a silent sphere of expression for Beatrice where the Igbo beliefs and culture frame the Christian experience of the postcolonial female subject instead of the European-oriented values that restrict and thwart Beatrice's attempts at self-actualization.

Aside from reversing the power dynamics between Igbo beliefs and Christian doctrines, the centralization of Beatrice's story in the cyclical narrative brings into question the monolithic understanding of black femininity and the one-rootedness of religious and cultural clashes in postcolonial Nigeria. Even though both *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* present gendered madness through the non-linear narrative in a way that constructs the narratorial space of madness as the locus of multifarious clashes within the particular societies they depict, *Yellow Sun* does not start from the middle of its narrative. *Meridian*, however, offers a cyclical narration where the title character's transformation and her transition from one-dimensionality to a multi-dimensional identity are emphasized. Echoing *Meridian*, *Hibiscus* starts from the

¹² Similar to the concept of reincarnation, Udeani accentuates the importance of Igbo ancestry. According to Igbo religion, good members of the community are honored to join the ancestors. However, people who suffer from madness, among other diseases, are excluded from this cycle and are doomed to exist as evil spirits (2007: 6). Adichie's utilization of the cyclical narrative at the center of Beatrice's madness reconfigures the concept of the 'good' Igbo who is worthy of a continual membership to the community.

middle of the story and defies the one-rootedness of the arborescent systems of thought that are prevalent in the highly divided society in the novel. The tendency of the novel to start from the very middle of the story where “Things started to fall apart at home” (*PH*, 9) induces the narrative to a rhizomatic direction. This direction does not refer to going back and forth to the same points of reference but to “a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” [emphasis in the original] (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 25). Both *Meridian* and *Hibiscus* reframe the transition of their madwomen through the cyclical structure that reshapes the first image of the female character from the viewpoint of readers over and over again in an attempt to defy monolithic interpretations of their experience. The structural parallelism between two intertexts further creates a dialogue in the representation of the madwomen that is utilized as a means to blur the otherwise clear-cut categories of their social structures.¹³ Whereas *Meridian*’s transformation deconstructs the polarization of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement, Beatrice’s transformation repudiates Eugene’s limited understanding of Christianity as the complete rejection of the pre-colonial past. The rhizomatic direction of the novel, despite its arborescent content, feminizes and domesticates the struggle of the Achike family by centralizing “home” as the middle point of conflicts—where the religious discourse is re-created—and centralizing the mother of the house—Beatrice whose silence is heard through the cyclical time of the narrative—as a witness for the sacred in the traditional Igbo religion. The breakdown of the dichotomous systems does not destroy the unity in the content and form, however. As Deleuze and Guattari propound, the linear unity of objects and concepts is shattered only to create a cyclical unity where “unity is consistently thwarted and obstructed in the object, while a new type of unity

¹³ It is important to note that both novels use the representation of madness through cyclical narrative as backward-looking devices to address the present. *Meridian* is published in 1976 when the struggle between Civil Rights and Black Power Movements still went on about the one true image of black identity as mentioned in the previous chapter. On a similar route, *Hibiscus*, examining a decade prior to its publication, sheds light on a still existing problem in Igbo society with regard to the truest definition of Igboness. For more information about twenty-first century evaluation of Igbo identity and its relation to Christianity, see Alex Harmeit-Sievers’ *Construction of Belonging: Igbo Communities and the Nigerian State in the Twentieth Century* (2006).

triumphs in the subject” (2005: 6). Within this framework, *Hibiscus* switches the narratorial focus from the cultural and political demarcations of Christianity and Igboness (object) to a feminized space of domesticity (subject), where the sacred co-exists with the silenced black subjectivity.

Unlike *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* that expose their madwomen’s inner and outer journey through an omniscient third-person narrator, *Hibiscus* offers a limited first-person narrator whose observations of Beatrice are limited to what can be seen and inferred from outside. Therefore, Beatrice’s presence, expressed through silence, and the patterns of her journey toward madness, and subsequently, potential transformation are shaped and presented through the power structures that dominate the narrative. Contrary to the previous novels where the madwomen are expressed through their own experience in their own right, *Hibiscus* emphasizes the subjugation of the madwoman by exposing her subtle subjectivity to the arborescent systems of thought, which are reflected by the ‘enlightened’ and Christianized African male, Eugene, and the overall one-dimensional Christian rhetoric. The domestic sphere, as Beatrice’s only territory, is structured by a dichotomous definition of Christianity where there is only one ‘right’ or ‘best’ way to be, which should constantly be reinforced through certain behavioral norms. In *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, political theorist Bhikhu Parekh accentuates the monolithic nature of moral monism, which dictates only one way of life as the best, or in the case of the acceptance of the existence of various values, that there is only one “best or truly rational way to combine them” (2000: 16). According to Parekh, Christian monism propagates moral universalism whereas Greek monism, especially Plato and Aristotle, prioritizes the superiority of rationality in human nature without paying attention to the function of culture in different societies. Framed within this structure, the domestic sphere *Hibiscus* depicts is driven by the Christian moral universalism and Greek monism. Whereas the former requires the imposition of its doctrines as the universal, the latter gives no room for the role of different cultures within Christianity and how these cultures do (not) have a say in the application of its doctrines. Rather, Europeanized interpretations of Christianity are taken to be the only true way to experience religiosity and spiritual authenticity. This exclusive ideology, which is overtly seen in Eugene as the most dominant and restrictive force for the muted Beatrice, creates a

binary rhetoric where Igboness contradicts with the only ‘best’ way to experience Christianity. The idealization of European values as the universal human nature, in turn, leads to the suppression and alleged inferiority of Igbo culture.

Adichie’s polarized narrative, which keeps her submissive madwoman in constant entrapment, reiterates the monistic structures of Beatrice’s surroundings through different uses of language. As a novel of silence, *Hibiscus* reveals the cultural and religious hierarchy in situations that require exclusively the use of English and Igbo. Beatrice, being the mother of the Achike family, is surrounded by an incessant religious experience. Yet, instead of the Igbo language, this religious experience is expressed in English, subordinating and devaluing other expressions of religiosity.¹⁴ The fifteen-year-old narrator Kambili ponders “Sometimes I imagined God calling me, his rumbling voice British-accented. He would not say my name right; like Father Benedict, he would place the emphasis on the second syllable rather than the first” (*PH*, 163). Mirroring the experience of a postcolonial subject stuck in a monolithic definition of Christianity as a white, European religion, Kambili reflects the inevitable sense of alienation and dissociation from the Supreme Being. Once the ultimate power, God, is identified with whiteness and Europeanness, it creates an exclusive discourse of the Tree that Deleuze and Guattari regard as the form of expression for the “principle of dichotomy” (2005: 212). As examined in previous chapters, the rigid segmentarity permeating social structures and various aspects of individual identity is constructed in a binary manner. A British-accented God, hence, dictates the superiority of English over Igbo. In an interview with Susan Arndt, Nigerian literary critic and writer Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi draws attention to the power dynamics behind the act of naming: “In my culture every name has a meaning. That is why when you give children English names that you cannot pronounce, they are meaningless,” whereas the Igbo name keeps the person in touch

¹⁴ The imposition of English on the experience of spirituality leads to a more severe sense of alienation especially when it is contextualized within African way of religiosity. As Udeani points out, traditional African religions do not refer to “a collection of doctrines and rites, but more a way of life and world interpretation” which cannot be separated from the everyday activities of the African (2007: 5). The prevalence of English for an African automatically extends to more than just the rituals or prayers, as can be seen in incessant religious nuances permeating Beatrice’s domestic and public presence.

with their sense of self (Arndt, 2000: 721). Ironically, unlike Kambili, Jaja, or any other Igbo character in the novel, Eugene and Beatrice are the only ones with a European name, creating an alleged availability to spirituality. Yet, this spirituality is subverted throughout the narrative as a form of alienation and an inner and outer destruction arising out of a break with one's roots.

In the same manner that the colonial epoch conjugated the Christianization and Europeanization of the native population, the division between the molar segments of English and Igbo goes beyond a dichotomy of spiritual/worldly identifications and extends to the exclusion of knowledge and enlightenment. One's adherence to the Igbo language is interpreted as a sign of being uncivilized, which puts them at a lower scale in the hierarchical power structure. By overemphasizing the Europeanized values of 'authority' figures around Beatrice, Adichie frames the devaluation of a postcolonial female agent who leans toward her native language and culture. Even though Eugene's rather radical restrictions and impositions on Beatrice and their children have often been a focus of analysis among literary critics, there is hardly any interest in Beatrice's father whose presence in the novel is limited to Kambili's memories and a framed picture in their living room. While the conflict between Eugene and his traditionalist father dominates the narrative, the clash between Beatrice and her father is not voiced. This voicelessness, however, serves as the very proof of the silencing of an Igbo-loving African woman. Echoing Eugene's values, Kambili remembers her late grandfather as a light-skinned interpreter who knew how to speak English and Latin and insisted on being called grandfather in English instead of Papa Nnukwu or Nna-Ochie (*PH*, 62). The Eurocentric and one-dimensional Igboness that is reflected through Beatrice's late father whose influence still permeates the Achike household—as apparent in his framed picture at the center of the house—extends Beatrice's cultural and spiritual alienation not only to her marital life but to her whole existence. Similarly, Eugene, another authority figure in Beatrice's life, encourages his family to speak the civilized language of English in public, leaving only the domestic sphere to be free of that pressure. Considering the Eurocentricity of the African, Kenyan writer and academic Ngugi wa Thiong'o claims that the biggest weapon of imperialism is the cultural bomb which annihilates "a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their

heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (1986: 3). Reflecting the traces of this cultural bomb, the monolithic tendency to regard English as the only way to spirituality, success and status in contrast to Igbo as a worldly, uncivilized and domestic language in the novel hints at the pre-colonial and colonial clashes of culture and religion, which are all reflected in Beatrice, who is stuck between these opposite molar segments. It is, then, no wonder that Beatrice, speaking in a language that signifies inferiority and displacement, is represented through a continual symbolism of silence.

Similar to the madwomen of *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, who occupy a liminal space within the rigid segmentaries prevalent in their narrative, Beatrice’s adherence to the Igbo language and rituals, as well as her submission to Europeanized interpretations of Christianity, engender a feminized liminal space. The possibility of this liminality to take a dynamic direction requires the act of passing through a dichotomous system of thought. Throughout the narrative, the monistic representations of Christianity, as Deleuze and Guattari show in the root system of the Tree, are portrayed in a circle of fixity. The exterior manifestations of Christian values are immersed in a static, immortal framework. This static structure is maintained through the monistic discourse of exclusion. Observing a white priest, Kambili claims: “Even though Father Benedict had been at St. Agnes for seven years, people still referred to him as “our new priest.” Perhaps they would not have if he had not been white. He still looked new” (*PH*, 10). The whiteness and the newness are sustained through the rejection of the Igbo culture, for Kambili goes on her description of Father Benedict with his restriction of hand clapping and the Igbo language in the church with the exception of offertory songs sung in Igbo. Attaching Igbo only to the financial aspect of the church as much as restricting manifestations of motion such as clapping and singing, the white priest creates a static understanding of religiosity experienced only in Latin and English. In a similar vein, Eugene criticizes a young Igbo priest, Father Amadi, for “singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms” (*Ibid.*, 28). The molar segment of Christianity is constructed against the molecular element of singing in Igbo. Drawing attention to the power of music, Deleuze and Guattari make use of the musical term ‘refrain’ to explain one’s

tendency to create subjective territories for survival. Birds sing to mark their territories: the Greek modes and Hindu rhythms are, likewise, “territorial, provincial, regional,” since the refrain always creates a land, sometimes “a spiritual land” (2005: 312). Adichie contrasts the strictly masculinized public experience of religiosity with Beatrice’s more rhizomatic spirituality through music. Her prayer group, invited to her house, sings Igbo songs “accompanied by robust hand clapping” (*PH*, 22). Likewise, she sings Igbo praise songs to celebrate the academic success of Kambili and Jaja. Adichie, exposing readers first to the masculinized molar segmentarities of Christianity, underscores the contrast between the one-dimensional discourse of the Europeanized interpretations of spirituality and Beatrice’s domestic sphere, which subverts the homogeneity of religiosity by incorporating Igbo songs into her personal territory. Unlike the larger context of cultural hierarchy, her spiritual land, gained through the refrain of Igbo music, reveals a positive attitude toward the traditional religion and culture. Yet, by silencing Beatrice’s ghostly presence in the narrative, Adichie highlights the alienation that comes as a price for the adherence to one’s pre-colonial heritage.

The exclusive structure of Christianity portrayed in the Achike household constitutes an antagonistic relationship between the body and mind, which obtrudes the denial of the black female body. Echoing *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, *Hibiscus* centralizes the sexual expression of the black female body as the most explicit trigger of madness since it is portrayed as a means of controlling and arborifying black femininity. The intellectually sophisticated environment of *Yellow Sun* and the acute political and racial divisions of *Meridian* are taken to the domestic sphere in *Hibiscus*, where the religious is transformed into the personal. Nigerian gender scholar Oyèrónké Oyěwùmi stresses the centrality of “bodylessness” as the precondition for the rational thought in the Western ideologies of difference, which is shaped by Cartesian dualism, where the body is the Other (2001: 3). This already body devaluing discourse gains new power within the dichotomous Christian theology in non-Western communities. In a similar manner, womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas contextualizes black religiosity within the dichotomy of body and mind prevalent in what she calls “platonized Christianity.” She argues that the clear-cut divide between the world of reason/spirit/soul and the world of

passion/flesh/body is eventuated into an antagonistic, and not reciprocal, relationship (2004: 351-2). This antagonism, Douglas propounds, clashes with the African understanding of God and spirituality since the African sees religion as part and parcel of every aspect of life including sexuality. The lack of “diminution of the earthly realm” in African spirituality is suppressed in an attempt to avoid assumptions of “the vileness of Blackness” (*Ibid.*, 356). Acculturated in the body devaluing atmosphere of postcolonial Christianity, Beatrice is desexualized. Her pregnancies throughout the narrative invariably come off as a surprise. In one of such moments Kambili observes:

I did not know she had been trying to have a baby since the last miscarriage almost six years ago. I could not even think of her and Papa together, on the bed they shared, custom-made, and wider than the conventional king-size. When I thought of affection between them, I thought of them exchanging the sign of peace at Mass, the way Papa would hold her tenderly in his arms after they had clasped hands (*PH*, 22).

Kambili’s imagination as the narrator does not let the idea of the sexual union of Eugene and Beatrice. The vastness and abundance of their household and the ‘custom-made’ bed are in alignment with their Christian praxis at Mass. Yet, the very reality that her parents are united in the church renounces the possibility of their sexual union. Rather than a woman and a man with desire, their relationship is taken to be the non-sexual relationship between two churchgoers. This exclusive dichotomy and the superiority of the soul/reason over the body turn into a rigid segmentarity that denies the sexualization of any spiritual experience or the spiritualization of any sexual experience. When they discuss the role of desire in the creation of rhizomes Deleuze and Guattari warn against arborescent structures in molar segments since “whenever desire climbs a tree [arborescent and dualistic paradigms], internal repercussions trip it up and it falls to its death” (2005: 14). Beatrice’s expression of sexuality, thus, is rigidified and arborified in Eugene, for his dominant presence in the narrative cuts through any attempt at creating rhizomes through desire. This attempt to desexualize Beatrice for the sake of spiritual authenticity can be linked to the over-sexualization of Olanna, who is objectified because of her beauty, and asexualization of Meridian whose preference to political

activism defies any sexual exploration of the black female body. None of these three depictions of the black madwoman permit a healthy and dynamic expression of black femininity and sexuality. The societal restrictions and labeling are highly connected to the textual construction of gendered madness since these literary texts highlight the imposition of an idealized black female sexuality by breaking down the monolithic perceptions of femininity.

Reminiscing *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* with its focus on the connection between motherhood and madness, *Hibiscus* delineates the black female body as the zone of monolithic power structures of religion and culture. Its engagement with the reproductive capacity of the female body reveals the hegemonic paradigms of postcolonial Nigeria and the ways the opposing forces deepen the liminality of black female subjectivity. Discussing the privileging of motherhood in African families as opposed to the concept of sisterhood in Western feminism, Oyèwùmí regards motherhood as “the most important source and model of solidarity” in the African family system (2003: 13). As explored in the representation of motherhood in *Yellow Sun*, gender politics in African societies in general and Igbo culture, in particular, is centered around the notion of motherhood and reproduction. The narrative perpetually contrasts the desirability of motherhood and the superior social status it provides with Beatrice’s constant miscarriages throughout the novel. Beatrice herself, in one of the rare moments she speaks, expresses the communal pressure for the female: “You know after you [Kambili] came and I had the miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper. The members of our umunna even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else” (*PH*, 21).¹⁵ Contrary to the previous novels that depict the liminality of the black madwoman as an opportunity to pass through dualistic paradigms, *Hibiscus* positions liminality, not in a rejection of two opposite forces, but the internalization of both. This, in turn, leads to a double sense of entrapment in the female subject rather than the flexibility and heterogeneity it provides for Olanna and *Meridian*. By portraying Beatrice in a state of

¹⁵ As many scholars have pointed out, regardless of the reason of infertility, the major blame is put on women (Okonofua et al., 1997) and the moral identities of women subjected to infertility are affected by “guilt, blame, accusation and gossip” (Dinka and Dein, 2013: 114). Adichie does not demonize Eugene, the Europeanized Christian African male. She enunciates the debilitating effects of the traditional community on the female subject as well.

hopelessness to reach perfection for the Europeanized and traditional Africans, Adichie creates a zone of interconnectedness with her subsequent novel through revealing how the liminality of an educated and culturally aware Olanna is eventuated to a more restrictive experience in Beatrice, who perceives more educated women as a threat to her domestic sphere: “So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too. They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr. Ezendu’s second wife did” (*Ibid.*). Depicting Beatrice as a woman whose existence is limited to the domestic space and whose sense of self is restricted by social norms, Adichie reveals the other facet of black femininity in postcolonial Nigeria. A religious, quiet and obedient housewife whose sense of self is entirely based on a stable domesticity, Beatrice also clashes with Walker’s textual construct of the madwoman, who experiences alienation because of her desire for education. These differences between texts which are connected through the madwoman trope critique the one-dimensional representation of liminality and madness in black women’s writing.

The representation of pregnancy and the black female body in *Hibiscus* challenges both traditional and Christian rhetoric. Adichie constructs a destructive feminine experience against the welcoming image of female reproductivity dominant in Igbo culture. This confrontational image of pregnancy as a burden and a means of violence brings into question the desirability of maternity in certain conditions and points at its inherent contradictions. Unlike the textual representation of maternity in *Yellow Sun*, which subverts the alleged connection between sexual intercourse and reproductivity, and *Meridian*, which does not offer a segment-free space for female-consented fertility, *Hibiscus* posits the reproductivity of a black female body against the will of a white Christian God, thus, incorporates a racialized gender politics into the religious discourse. Since Beatrice’s presence is depicted through silence, her inner world is limited to manifestations of exteriority, which in turn is limited to the subjective observations of the young narrator, who is mostly impressed with her father, Eugene, whereas her comments on Beatrice are aimed to reveal her poor condition throughout the narrative. Beatrice’s experience of pregnancy is, hence, observed by Kambili in a contrasting manner to the celebratory attitude of the Igbo. Rather than portrayed as a lively, positive situation, Beatrice’s pregnant belly looks

like a “deflated football” (*PH*, 27).¹⁶ Her physical appearance in general lacks vitality or any indication of the cultural glorification of maternity:

I watched Mama as we walked. Till then I had not noticed how drawn she looked. Her skin, usually the smooth brown of groundnut paste, looked like the liquid had been sucked out of it, ashen, like the color of cracked harmattan soil (*Ibid.*, 29).

Rather than a blessing, Beatrice’s pregnancy gives the impression of a debilitating disease, making her physical appearance and posture look sick. This contradiction between the glorified motherhood in Igbo culture and her own experience is utilized to reveal Beatrice’s entrapment between the dualistic paradigms of Christianity and Igbo traditions. Her unwillingness to visit a white priest due to her physical state arising out of pregnancy is perceived to be a “selfish desire” by Eugene, which leads to domestic violence and concomitantly, one of her many miscarriages. Instead of valuing pregnancy as a blessing from God, Eugene prioritizes God’s will, reflected by the visit to the white priest, and destroys his own offspring as a punishment. The narrative constructs the reproductivity of the African female body against the will of the white man, equated with the will of God. This dichotomous construction between God’s will and Beatrice’s ‘imperfections’, which are always punished with violent miscarriages, reveal the in-betweenness of the black female as well as the dangerous effects of European inculcation on the African household.¹⁷

Aside from cultural, religious and sexual estrangement, *Hibiscus* connects the liminality of its madwoman to the political upheaval of postcolonial Nigeria, which is shaped and distorted by a vicious cycle of military coups and internal conflicts. Identical to Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of molar segments as well-defined,

¹⁶ This imagery becomes more important later in the story when Kambili compares her Aunt Ifeoma to a football coach “who had done a good job with her team and was satisfied to stand next to the eighteen-yard box and watch” (*Ibid.*, 110). By comparing Beatrice and Aunt Ifeoma’s maternal stance through the football imagery, Adichie reveals how Beatrice is in the position of an object and Ifeoma a subject. This, in turn, is related to the degree of their capacity to conjugate different aspects of two polarizations of their colonial history.

¹⁷ Interestingly, theologian Katie G. Cannon divides sexual politics for black female churchgoers into two: “a positive blessing for procreative purposes” or “a negative curse” evoking bodily pleasure (2004: 11). Yet, the novel posits the madwoman of the story not in between these two conflicting discourses but against them. Deprived of any blessing due to the blackness of her body, Beatrice’s pregnancies are constantly thwarted by Eugene’s violence.

clear-cut categories, the Achike household is portrayed in a strictly organized manner where every day, every hour and every activity is separated into well-defined segments and planned by Eugene. This orderliness is preserved even in the enactment of a military coup.¹⁸ By emphasizing the order of the house, Adichie contradicts the controllable domestic sphere with the chaotic public sphere. Beatrice's pregnancies disrupt the orderliness of Eugene's man-made world and expose it to the outside. As Kambili points out after the coup: "But nothing changed at home. Jaja and I still followed our schedules, still asked each other questions whose answers we already knew. The only change was Mama's belly" (*PH*, 27). Beatrice's femininity, with its reproductive and uncontrollable capacity, is the only bridge that creates chaos in the domestic sphere and interlocks it with the political corruption outside. The connection between Beatrice and the public chaos is further strengthened through the correlation between domestic and public violence. After Beatrice's hospitalization, Kambili claims: "Mama did not come home that night, and Jaja and I had dinner alone. We did not talk about Mama. Instead, we talked about the three men who were publicly executed two days before, for drug trafficking" (*Ibid.*, 32). The gender-based violence imposed on Beatrice's body is replaced with the political violence of the military government, blurring the line between formerly well-defined molar segments.¹⁹ Beatrice, as an overt manifestation of the vulnerability of the domestic order, is further alienated on her liminal position. In a similar manner to *Yellow Sun*, where Olanna is portrayed to be the witness for

¹⁸ Kambili, right before mentioning the coup, ponders: "Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating study from siesta, siesta from family time, family time from eating, eating from prayer, prayer from sleep" (*PH*, 25). This orderliness sheds light on how their life is divided into molar segments without the interference of the national and political chaos at the background.

¹⁹ Interestingly, even though the novel is set in the late 90s, the events and national politics represented in the narrative extends to the three military governments that took place between 1984-1999 as Adichie incorporates watershed moments of military oppression and corruption of these years into the fictional timeline of the novel such as the death of the *Newswatch* editor, Dele Giwa (1987) and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa (1995) (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 210). By creating a collective image of the Buhari, Babangida and Abacha regimes, Adichie re-contextualizes Nigerian history from a feminized viewpoint, which links the madness of Beatrice to the larger political and national insanity of the period. As Adichie juxtaposes different political crises of postcolonial Nigeria, she creates unity out of the chaotic political structure, which aligns with the domestic insanity of the Achike household. The boundary between the public and private, therefore, is blurred through Beatrice's madness.

the gendered violence in the war, and *Meridian*, where the title character connects domesticity with political activism, *Hibiscus* utilizes madness as a bridge between otherwise separated segments of society. This relationality among three intertexts necessitates the breaking down of allegedly clear-cut segments of oppression and hegemonic structures. Echoing the previously examined novels, *Hibiscus* complicates the homogeneous constructions of black femininity and reflects this monolithic textual representation as a trigger for psychic demise and deterioration.

3.3. “Desire to Annihilate”: Breaking of Social Segments and the Black Hole of Domesticity

Revealing the exclusive molar segments of society that position black femininity on a liminal space, *Hibiscus* presents a silent textual construct of female madness, which evokes a different examination from *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, both of which overtly centralize the experience of gendered madness in the narrative. Due to its repudiation of existing social structures, madness in the depiction of female characters by female writers has often been interpreted subversive. This gratification of gendered madness, in turn, has been criticized by scholars who point out its destructive capacity and its implications of hopelessness. In her canonical work on literary madness *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter underlines the danger of romanticizing the literary representations of female madness as a “desirable form of rebellion” instead of an indication of powerlessness in feminist literary criticism (1987: 5). In like manner, critic Caroline A. Brown highlights the necessity of differentiating between being silenced and actively resisting in the depiction of the madwoman, and not turning madness into a strategic essentialism (2017: 4). Positioned within this dualistic paradigm, *Hibiscus* explores the possibility of inner and outer transformation through the breaking of all segments. In their discussion about the line of flight, which is a non-segmentary line, Deleuze and Guattari give a similar warning about the gratification of the line of flight, indicating that sometimes not escaping (flight) is not the worst thing that can happen since the line of flight might turn into a line of death (2005: 205). The possibility of the line of flight to turn

to destruction is manifested in Beatrice's murder of her husband, Eugene, in the midst of her madness. Unlike previous novels, Beatrice's experience of madness/line of flight revolves around the inability to negotiate inner and outer worlds and foregrounds the interconnectedness between internal and external transformation, where the breaking of homogeneous and exclusive categorizations requires a heterogeneous and inclusive reconstruction of them.

Hibiscus presents a dual existence for the black madwoman through the motif of the ballet-dancing figurines that are placed in the Achike household. Instead of the verbal constructions of the molar segments prevalent in the novel, Beatrice's inner world is expressed with her constant silent visits to the glass etagère during the times she is exposed to domestic violence and subsequently, to miscarriages. As many critics have already pointed out, figurines serve as a coping mechanism for Beatrice. Yet, this coping mechanism also leads to a dual existence that Beatrice constructs against the monolithic understanding of Christianity and the Igbo past. Against Eugene's dominant masculine narrative, which equals Christianity with Europeanization and Igbo history with, in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's words, a cultural "wasteland" (1986: 3), Beatrice's preservation of the ballet-dancing figurines creates a heterogeneous time and space in the Achike household. In her examination of the implications of miniatures, Susan Stewart draws attention to the metaphysical world of miniatures, which makes everyday life "anterior and exterior to itself" (2007: 65), for the world of miniatures is a world of "arrested time" where "the outside world stops and is lost to us" (*Ibid.*, 67). Beatrice's figurines construct an independent dimension from the male-dominated, Europe-oriented Christian world of everyday life. Moreover, her constant visits to the etagère turn into a resistant activity in an attempt to claim her Igbo past and heritage, both of which are suppressed and regarded as the remnants of a shameful phase that needs to be erased and forgotten within the boundaries of her domestic space. Similar to Stewart's analysis of the double-consciousness of miniatures, Udeani underlines the heterogeneous conceptions of religiosity in Igbo culture, where time and space are multi-layered. Rather than fixating solely on the visible world, the Igbo believe in the visible (*Uwa*) and the invisible (*Ani Muo*) worlds commensurately (2007: 21). Quoting M. Eliade, Udeani further delineates the holy time and space the Igbo reach through repetitive

religious rituals and feasts, which function as an exit from the usual time to a “mythical time” that “remains itself the same, never changing, and is never being exhausted” (*Ibid.*, 27). The incessant repeatability of the liturgical time in the traditional Igbo religion is integrated into Beatrice’s washing and re-arrangement of the figurines, an act that is synced with her violent punishments due to her inability to fit into the definition of the “perfect” Christian in the masculine discourse dominating the narrative. Wrapped in silence, the novel positions Beatrice’s coping mechanism in a dimension that is opposite to that of Eugene. Whereas Eugene’s values and his continual imposition of them dismiss the Igbo past and culture as a historical epoch worthy of acknowledgement, Beatrice’s outward manifestation of her recognition of the pre-colonial history and her refuge from European doctrines are exposed as a textual confrontation, albeit in a subtle manner unlike the active rebellion of overt resistance of the previously examined madwomen.

The transformational potential of figurines to create an intrinsic and extrinsic heterogeneous time and space is thwarted by the very nature of Beatrice’s “resistance.” Unlike *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, *Hibiscus* presents a static metaphor for the externalization of the inner world of its madwoman. As explored in the first chapter, Olanna resists plastic flowers at all costs, indicating her desire and actualization of a dynamic, shifting femininity against the static, masculinized representation of ethnic ideologies. Likewise, *Meridian*’s search for inner transformation is centered around the Sojourner tree, which carries the traces of her African American past and heritage as well as keeping that past in constant evolvment and growth, in opposition to homogeneous and exclusive racial and gender categories prevalent in the narrative. Interestingly, the figurines are ballet dancers, “in various contorted postures” (*PH*, 12). They are always in motion, as seen in Kambili’s description of one of the figurines whose “matchstick-size legs raised high in the air” (*Ibid.*, 33). This ‘dynamic’ image of the figurines contradicts with Beatrice’s static posture and lack of mobility. Throughout the novel, Kambili draws attention to her limping gait: “She limped slightly, as though one leg were shorter than the other, a gait that made her seem even smaller than she was” (*Ibid.*, 15). Contrary to Olanna and *Meridian* who lose the function of their legs temporarily in their experience of madness, which indicates their (in)capacity for a dynamic

journey, Beatrice's limping gait, before and after her line of flight, never improves. Even though this immobility and fixity are contrasted with the motion of the figurines on the surface, figurines, being miniatures, by their very nature, "negate[s] change and the flux of lived reality" (Stewart, 2007: 65). Instead of transforming her experience of heterogeneous time and space into a physical reality, Beatrice's attachment to the figurines turns into a manifestation of her dichotomous understanding of religion and culture. Her spatial silence in the narrative disrupts the Europeanized indoctrination of Christianity; but rather than negotiating the pre-colonial past with the postcolonial present, Beatrice responds to fixity with fixity. Her alternative reality results from desire as lack, and not from an active resistance against the one-dimensionality of Igboness. Hence, figurines accentuate the dual existence of the narrative rather than challenging it.

The breaking of figurines breaks down the molar segments of the narrative and forms a non-segmented position for Beatrice. Partly due to the non-linear narrative, which starts the story with the breaking of figurines and partly to Beatrice's resistance against internal change and growth, Eugene's act of breaking the figurines has mostly been interpreted as a turning point for Beatrice by scholars, indicating that the broken figurines serve as the trigger of Beatrice's madness and subsequent act of murder. André Kaboré regards figurines as the representation of Beatrice, and Eugene's destruction of them as a watershed moment for her to act, or murder (2013: 34). Similarly, interpreting the glass etagère as Beatrice's shrine, Brenda Cooper draws attention to the immediate change in Beatrice's attitude after the breaking of figurines, connecting her act of rebellion with the destruction of her "sacred space" by Eugene (2013: 116). However, the prioritization of the figurines in the formation of Beatrice's agency, albeit a dangerous and destructive one, downplays the breaking of molar segments in Beatrice's attitude and actions. Even though the cyclical structure of the narrative starts from the breaking of figurines, Beatrice's gradual transformation is reflected in the second part of the novel, "Speaking with Our Spirits." In a linear framework, her transformation starts before Palm Sunday, which is the day Eugene breaks the figurines. By shifting the outward manifestation of Beatrice's transformation to the beginning of the story, Adichie emphasizes the dominance of exteriority and the silencing of interiority in the novel.

Since figurines function as a non-verbal form of self-expression for Beatrice, they lose their utility before, and not because, Eugene shatters them into pieces. Before the destruction of her figurines, Beatrice goes through a subtle change apparent in her verbal and non-verbal communication. Her explanation for previous miscarriages masks the reality of domestic violence that is imposed on her: “There was an *accident*, the baby is gone” [emphasis added] (*PH*, 32). However, later in the narrative, she verbalizes her last miscarriage:

“You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, *nne*? Your father broke it on my belly.” She sounded as if she were talking about someone else, as if the table were not made of sturdy wood. “My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it [the baby]” (*Ibid.*, 223).

The alleged ‘accident’ turns into an acknowledgement and verbalization of gendered and domestic violence. Moreover, earlier in the narrative, Kambili draws attention to Beatrice’s lack of tears in her figurine-washing ritual after exposure to violence whereas now “a thin line of tears crawled down her cheeks as though it had been a struggle for them to get out of her eyes” (*Ibid.*). Her silence and lack of physical reaction change into verbal and explicit manifestations of reality. Rather than relying on figurines to suppress the imposition of a masculinized ideal image, Beatrice acts on her agency. By disassociating her sense of self from figurines before they are shattered by Eugene, Adichie elevates her mad character from the position of the object to the subject, where the breaking of figurines brings Beatrice’s dual existence to an end and leads her to the binary-free line of flight.²⁰

Hibiscus presents a locational point of heterogeneity, created out of a harmony between the pre-colonial past and the postcolonial present, through the dynamic representation of Nsukka. Both *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* offer a rhizomatic location for their mad characters, where the formerly well-defined and dichotomous

²⁰ The breaking of figurines can also be interpreted as an outward manifestation of change in the strictly-defined Achike household if it is contextualized within Stewart’s analysis of miniatures as negating change. As Beatrice goes through a subtle transformation in silence, the shattered figurines hint at the breaking down of her fixed world, the mythical Igbo past and heritage. Thus, the absence of figurines indicates the end of the arrested time dominating Beatrice’s consciousness and the existence of change.

structures of society are challenged and reconstructed. For Olanna, Kano provides a welcoming point of location where the ethnic divide of the war is replaced with harmony. Meridian's inner and outer journey to the South turns into a dynamic journey where the previously asserted black and gendered identities are restructured and redefined. Deleuze and Guattari examine such interference to one's well-structured and exclusive molar segments through the molecular line, which brings into play "a macropolitics and a micropolitics that do not envision classes, sexes, people, or feelings in at all the same way" (2005: 196). *Hibiscus* engages in a textual relationship with the previous novels by portraying a heterogeneous space that triggers the madness as a form of breaking down of all segments and as a nurturing cultural space that guides the characters in the absence of all social segments, which Deleuze and Guattari emphasize as a necessity for the construction of a healthy line of flight. Contrary to Enugu, which is shaped by Eugene's masculine and one-dimensional understanding of racial and religious identity, Nsukka is represented to be a liberating place where the traditional Igbo stories and feasts, formerly dismissed as devilish folklore by Eugene, are valued, and Christian prayers are accompanied by Igbo songs. The blond Virgin and Child painting in Eugene's room is replaced with a dark-skinned Virgin and Child painting in Nsukka. Unlike the trapped femininity depicted in Beatrice's subtle presence, Aunt Ifeoma, dominating the heterogeneous structure of Nsukka, resembles "a proud ancient forebear, walking miles to fetch water in homemade clay pots, nursing babies until they walked and talked, fighting wars with machetes sharpened on sun-warmed stone" (*PH*, 73). Instead of a submissive, muted presence against the monolithic social structures, Ifeoma reveals an alternative black femininity that conjugates Igboness and Christianity in a dynamic harmonization of the past and present. Through Kambili's eyes, the narration constantly creates an alternative value system in Nsukka. However, unlike Kambili and Jaja who go through an inner transformation in Nsukka, Beatrice is exposed to its feminized and heterogeneous structure only to realize "the existence of another life" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 195) without internalizing its multi-dimensional understanding of femininity and religiosity.²¹ In contrast to previous

²¹ As Beatrice's inner world is narrated through exterior manifestations, Adichie exposes her lack of

novels that depict the journey of madness as an intrinsic experience with external outflows, *Hibiscus* excludes Beatrice from the nourishing cultural space of heterogeneity, which, in turn, leads her to a destructive and extrinsic experience of the line of flight.

Excluding Beatrice from the creative potential of non-segmentarity, *Hibiscus* portrays her experience of madness not as a means of inner and outer transformation but as a form of line of death. Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari underscore the double-nature of the line of flight, which is a rhizomatic force exploding molar and molecular lines to create a new, free line. As lines of flight intrinsically carry the potential of destruction within themselves, which Deleuze and Guattari call ‘a black hole’, they defy any attempt to romanticize the line of flight and offer precaution:

If you free it [line of flight] with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe. Staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected—is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever (2005: 161).

Their evaluation of the line of flight does not encourage the explosion of molar and molecular lines at all costs. On a similar note, *Hibiscus* does not celebrate the rebellion of madness, or romanticize it as the ultimate feminized space of self-actualization. Instead, it depicts Beatrice’s madness detrimental to her alleged freed femininity. Whereas Olanna and Meridian shift their consciousness from segmented to non-segmented and follow a binary-free direction through the line of flight, Beatrice attempts to change the external world without transforming her inner world. Against the backdrop of the domestic violence and religious fundamentalism surrounding the Achike household, Adichie raises the option of divorce through Ifeoma: “Sometimes life begins when marriage ends” (*PH*, 68). Placing the Nsukka-

intrinsic transformation in subtle details. Unlike Kambili and Jaja, who internalize the liberating multi-dimensionality of Nsukka, Beatrice “could not see the picture with the cracked frame or the fresh African lilies in the oriental vase” (*PH*, 223), which are objects that are formerly associated with a dynamic sense of Igboness. Beatrice’s journey, thus, takes an external route, where change is imposed from outside while the internalization of imperial and patriarchal doctrines remain intact.

based narrative between the first and third parts of the story, where Beatrice acts on her despair and desire to be free from the masculinized power dynamics, Adichie again accentuates other alternatives of femininity through Ifeoma, who rejects the idealization of marriage. As Beatrice reaches a line of flight without releasing her consciousness of the social segments imposed on her, her line of flight is “freed but segmented” and remains “negative and blocked” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 137).²² Her line of flight, unlike Olanna and Meridian who succeed in creating a non-segmented space between segments, evokes rejection of all segments and leads to a black hole, which is constituted by the desire to annihilate. The rhizomatic nature of the divorce is replaced by murder. Since Beatrice’s consciousness remains segmented, the novel offers a segmented ‘solution’ to her problem, which imposes external change without internal transformation. Moreover, this external change creates a double-edged sword, where not only the male but also the female is caged further within social aggregates. In opposition to Olanna and Meridian, who “pass between” the strict definitions of race/ethnicity and gender, Beatrice experiences line of flight/death as a process of further estrangement. Even though she is freed from social conventions such as mourning for Eugene in the traditional manner, she is taken outside of all means of creating meaning and turns into a shadow of her former self, who does not hear or say anything and keeps a life of silence as before. The ‘freedom’ that comes with madness brings meaninglessness and lack of feminine subjectivity with it.

Through Beatrice’s madness and her concomitant act of murder, *Hibiscus* problematizes the gender politics prevalent in the narrative. Whereas Olanna and Meridian create a heterogeneous space of femininity and masculinity, Beatrice’s transformation from a submissive, quiet wife to a murderess perpetuates the very gender structures against which she rebels. In *Yellow Sun*, Adichie constructs an

²² It is important to contextualize Adichie’s portrayal of Beatrice as torn between her desire to free herself and her inability to choose divorce. In Igbo culture, where communal identity is mostly more important than individual identity, a woman’s experience of divorce is regarded as undesirable since it is the woman who is affected most by it and her chances of another relationship remain low (Nwokocha, 2007: 227-8). Thus, Beatrice’s fear of judgment and further alienation should be considered within the framework of Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of the assurance and safety of molar segmentation, which refers to one’s taking refuge in one’s molar identity and fearing its loss.

intellectual world where her mad character actualizes her inner desire for freedom. Likewise, Walker posits Meridian in a liminal space that still allows her to be politically active and sexually unconventional. Beatrice's line of death, on the other hand, is reflected in the society that leads her to desire annihilation. Interestingly, Adichie resolves the conflict after the murder by putting Jaja in prison for Beatrice's action. This scenario of the murderous son and grief-stricken mother is perceived to be more plausible to social norms as Beatrice's attempts to tell the truth fall on to deaf ears:

But nobody listened to her; they still don't. They think grief and denial—that her husband is dead and that her son is in prison—have turned her into this vision of a painfully bony body, of skin speckled with blackheads the size of watermelon seeds (*PH*, 258).

The society perceives the demise of Beatrice's mental state as an inevitable result of male-inflicted (Eugene's death and Jaja's imprisonment) grief rather than Beatrice's own choice and action. By shifting Beatrice's murder to Jaja's imprisonment, the narrative foregrounds and confronts the conception of motherhood as always self-sacrificing, the masculine power and aggression over other males or females, and the impossibility of the image of a violent woman. Within the existing gender values, it is depicted more acceptable for a son to inherit his father's deeds and misdeeds. In this case, Jaja's imprisonment translates into a power structure since taking responsibility for one's actions is as self-actualizing as taking the action itself. Therefore, through her inability to take responsibility for her line of death, Beatrice only imposes external change, which takes her from the authority of one male to the other. In other words, her experience of the line of flight is recaptured into the masculinized power dynamics of rigid segmentation, negating the creative potential of her madness to construct a binary-free space of femininity.

Reminiscing *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* in its creation of the line of flight within the narratorial structure, *Hibiscus* utilizes gendered madness as a way to reflect the interlocking segments of social aggregates, which contests the homogeneity of polarized power dynamics, from a feminized viewpoint. Beatrice's portrayal of madness blurs the alleged boundaries between cultural, religious,

gendered and political dimensions of postcolonial definitions of Igboness. Of all the ways to kill Eugene, Beatrice chooses to poison her husband through his daily habit of drinking Lipton tea. Adichie's preference for the poison in the tea motif connects seemingly different elements of past and present conceptions of Igboness and Christianity. Whereas the tea Eugene drinks indicates his Eurocentric attitude, in various parts of the narrative, the motif is attached to the evangelization of the Igbo. In a bathroom scene where Eugene burns Kambili in the bathtub as a punishment for spending time with her paternal grandfather, who represents the ancient Igbo values and complete rejection of Christianity, Kambili points out the source of the hot water, which is "the green kettle Sisi [the maid] used to boil hot water for tea and garri, the one that whistled when the water started to boil" (*Ibid.*, 176). The means for Eugene's tea, the kettle, turns into an act of torture and imposes the rejection of the traditional Igbo religion and culture embodied in Papa Nnukwu. This connection between Beatrice's murder and the repudiation of Igbo past is eventuated into a multi-layered facet for the domestic and public conflicts, for Eugene links Kambili's 'sin' of seeing her grandfather to his own sexual 'sin' which he committed against his own body. In an almost identical manner to Kambili's punishment, Eugene is punished by the white priest with the hot water meant for tea. Through these interlocking scenes, Eurocentrism, the rejection of the Igbo past and sexual suppression of the black body are intertwined. Beatrice's poison serves as a mirror to shed light on the ambiguity of these connections and breaks down the fixed boundaries among them. Likewise, Eugene's death through his tea complicates the formerly clear-cut definitions of good and evil.²³ Even though his death relieves Beatrice and her children of physical and psychological violence of the domestic space, Eugene's constant insistence on freedom of speech and democracy, along with his countless charity actions within the community, resists the demonization of the

²³ Calling Eugene a "sycophantic Anglophile," Cooper criticizes Adichie's representation of Eugene, indicating that the violent man of the domestic sphere clashes with the respected public person who defends and actualizes freedom of speech in the country (2013: 128). Cooper claims that "we, as readers, only feel support for Mama and relief when she murders him," suggesting Adichie goes too far to redeem him. However, *Hibiscus* incessantly defies fixed and clear-cut definitions of good and evil. Instead, the narrative constantly necessitates the molecularization of persons, cultures and religions, a process that blurs the positive and negative constructions of differentiation.

Eurocentric consciousness. By disrupting the differentiation of public and domestic space through Beatrice's madness, Adichie depicts the insanity of postcolonial Nigeria, where all forms of oppression, like Eugene's tea, are intermingled. Thanks to this multivalence of connections within social aggregates and individual identities, the portrayal of gendered madness in *Hibiscus* constructs a textual interconnectedness with the depiction of madness in *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*. Through their relationality, these intertexts utilize madness as the feminization of defiance and the deconstruction of the sociopolitical context that gives rise to the line of flight, from which the liminal feminized experiences flee and flow.

As Davoine points out in an interview with Cathy Caruth, "madness is always a fight against denial" (2014: 81). In a textual dialogue with *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, *Hibiscus* fights against the denial of the voicelessness of black female subjectivity in postcolonial Nigeria through a muted but simultaneously voiced representation of gendered madness. Unlike the previously examined novels that center their depiction of female madness around the political upheaval of a turning point in the history of their racial and ethnic formations, namely the Biafran War and the Civil Rights-the Black Power Movement, *Hibiscus* represents the unrepresented and focalizes the domestic sphere as the locus of cultural, spiritual and political clashes. Rather than explicitly portraying Beatrice's process of madness, the novel, only silencing the madwoman, utilizes silence and ambiguous imagery to reflect on the intrinsic and extrinsic facets of resistance against one-dimensional religious and racial discourses of exclusion, all of which are transmitted via emphasis through omission. Through textual relationality and structural parallelism with the previous representations of female liminality and madness, *Hibiscus* offers a destructive and exteriority-oriented journey of the line of flight. This journey brings into question the nature of individual and societal transformation through an ongoing clash between interiority and exteriority. In congruence with *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, the depiction of Beatrice's violent and detrimental line of flight, therefore, evokes the necessity of breaking down all hierarchical and exclusive social structures in order to reach a heterogeneous and inclusive construction of black femininity. Regarding the extreme representations of female subjectivity as angel and monster, Gilbert and Gubar accentuate the need for the deconstruction of the "aesthetic ideal" (2000: 17).

Due to its constant engagement with the previous works and its avoidance of romanticization or demonization of madness via the line of flight, *Hibiscus* contests the aesthetic ideal of black femininity and posits Beatrice's ambiguous experience of madness not in an antithetical relationship with *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, but in a multi-dimensional creation of a black female subjectivity that acts and reacts on a rhizomatic structure of intertextuality.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE RITUALIZATION OF THE FEMALE BODY AND MADNESS IN *POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY*

The present chapter focuses on Walker's polemical novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) within the intertextual framework of the previously analyzed literary works. Similar to *Hibiscus*, which brings a new layer of meaning to the concept of gendered madness as an extrinsic journey of transformation, *Possessing* creates a multi-directional dialogue with *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* in its depiction of a more radical form of black female subjectivity. As the representation of the feminine space of madness is inextricably linked to social, cultural and political constructions of femininity in a more international and cross-cultural framework than earlier novels, *Possessing* problematizes dichotomous structures of power in a larger context. This complex concatenation of dichotomies is contextualized within Deleuze and Guattari's line of flight, a concept—the chapter argues—that enables the intellectual plausibility to explore multi-faceted dimensions of literary depictions of female madness. The chapter presents *Possessing* as an alternative discursive structure for the rhizomatic and intrinsically shaped experience of madness examined in *Olanna* and *Meridian*. In a closer connection to Beatrice, the protagonist of *Possessing*, Tashi will be evaluated through Deleuzoguattarian construction of the 'black hole' where madness functions as an external force of destruction rather than an intrinsic potential of creativity. However, the novel will be analyzed, not in an antithetical manner, but in complementary relativity with the previous works. Echoing the other novels, Walker's text converges the exteriority and interiority of madness. It blurs the clear-cut definitions of personal and communal transformation, agency and self-actualization.

The first sub-section of the chapter will focus on the historical and cultural complexity of the practice of female genital cutting, which has often been the primary concern of critics and is seen as the main trigger for Tashi's madness. The section will cover the cross-cultural conflicts of the matter through the perspective of colonial-anticolonial, Western-African feminist and human rights discourses, all of which present divergent, and mostly contradictory, interpretations of the practice.

The second sub-section will illustrate the multifarious molar aggregates that lead to Tashi's madness, some of which have been attenuated or overlooked due to the emphasis on Tashi's experience of female genital cutting over other dimensions of her psychic demise. The third sub-section will dwell on the dualistic process of Tashi's madness, which aligns with but also differs from the destructive madness portrayed in *Hibiscus*. The section will reveal the relationality between imposed external change—murder—and the possibility of creating new lines of connection, agency and self-expression through the line of flight. It, in turn, inherently diversifies and frees madness of segmentation. Within this complex portrayal of madness and its creative potential, the chapter reiterates the previously emphasized necessity of non-segmentation, interiority and inner transformation for the construction of a dynamic black female subjectivity.

Exploring the liminality of Tashi, an African woman from an imaginary community called Olinka, *Possessing* foregrounds the vital role culture and traditions play on the formation of femininity and the ways 'limiting' cultural praxes perpetuate incessant alienation and mental crisis for those who go beyond clear-cut divisions of femininity, Africanness and postcoloniality. Echoing the previous novels in its engagement with the larger political context, *Possessing* examines a gendered crisis, the practice of female genital cutting, within the larger crisis of decolonization and migratory nuances of postcolonialism. Through its main focus on this culturally endorsed practice, the novel is often positioned in the contentious debate over female genital cutting as a ritual that evokes cultural clashes on the international level. Scholar Elisabeth Bekers divides the literary engagement with the practice into three categories in terms of their thematic approach, political stance and point of departure. The first set of writers, who published between 1963-1974, examine female genital cutting with the awareness of its communal significance for the practicing African post-independent communities and emphasize its connection to the definition of ethnicity in the colonial conflict (Bekers, 2010: 73). These works include Rebeka Njau's *The Scar* (1963), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965), Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Muthoni Likimani's *They Shall Be Chastised* (1974). Published between 1968-1988 and written in Arabic, English and French, the second-generation of texts present more overt criticism of the practice in light of the

disillusionment with the post-independence state. This, in turn, leads to the replacement of the concern of the first-generation texts for colonial conflict with the feminist exploration of the practice in the gender politics of their respective communities (*Ibid.*, 148). These texts include Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* (1968), Nawal El Saadawi's *Two Women in One* (1971), *Woman at Point Zero* (1973), *the Circling Song* (1976) and Calixthe Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988). As opposed to the first two generations, the third-generation texts, published between 1982-1998, entail a cross-cultural point of authorship and include writers who critique female genital cutting as an outsider. This outsidership precipitates problems of cultural pluralism and imperialism. They include Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe* (1992) and *Re/membering Aunt Jemima* (1996) by Breena Clark and Glenda Dickerson. Set in a broader intercultural framework, these texts posit the West "as a point of comparison" to the oppressive African gender rituals (*Ibid.*, 194). As a part of this tradition, Walker's novel creates a heterogeneous space for the exploration of female madness both in dialogue with numerous discourses entailing female genital cutting and with the previously examined works in terms of social change and the need for rhizomatic female subjectivity.

Walker's exploration of the practice of female genital cutting in an international framework wherein she compares African cultural practices with their alleged absentia in Western culture serves as a demand for disillusionment against the romanticized images of Africa both by African American writers and former colonizers. Her representation of a gender ritual prevalent in some African cultures, which she defines as a "torture" (Walker and Parmar, 1996: 270), goes against the idealization of Africa by African American writers of the 1960s and writers of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s (Cobb Moore, 2000: 113). The insistence of a self-affirming black identity in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s examined in the second chapter and the "black is beautiful" concept of the Harlem Renaissance bring forth a close connection with the motherland, Africa, which is perceived as a source of pride and a sense of belonging. Analyzing the African American tendency to bond with a fantasized Africa, writer Gay Wilentz draws attention to Ethiopianism of the black diaspora, which indicates their self-association with an idealized image of

Africa and rejection of the 'primitivism' inherent in Western imagination (2003: 643). Similarly, *Possessing* disrupts the inhuman construction of the African subject who endures and transcends the effects of psychological and physical violence that are otherwise unbearable for a human. Taken from the observations of an Italian writer, Mirella Ricciardi, the title of the novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* itself defies this deprivation of Africa's humanity. Raised in Kenya, Ricciardi claims in her book *African Saga* (1982):

I had always got on well with the Africans and enjoyed their company, but commanding the people on the farm, many of whom had watched [me] grow up, was different. With the added experience of my safaris behind me, I had begun to understand the code of "birth, copulation and death" by which they lived. Black people are natural, they possess the secret of joy, which is why they can survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them. *They are alive physically and emotionally*, which makes them easy to live with [emphasis added] (qtd. in *PSJ*, vii).

This image of the easy-going, unaffected African is challenged in the opening line of the novel where Tashi states "I did not realize for a long time that I was dead" (*Ibid.*, 16). Through Tashi's experience of physical and psychological trauma, which results in her madness, Walker constructs a counter-narrative against Ricciardi's observation of subjugated Africans as physically and emotionally alive. This constant rejection of the novel to be romanticized and idealized creates textual parallelism with the earlier works, especially *Meridian* and *Purple Hibiscus*.¹ Whereas the former defies the romantic image of the revolution and the futility of masculine chauvinism within the Black Power Movement, the latter subverts the clear-cut distinctions between the traditional and Europeanized Africans. *Possessing* constructs a dialogue with these texts through its representation of madness which reveals the unrepresented dimension of its cultural and historical complexity.

¹ Even though *Yellow Sun*'s scholarly interpretations do not dwell on its defiance of a romanticized image of the Igbo as much as the other three novels, it still engages in this intertextual dialogue of madness as a medium of stripping a culture of its romanticization. Its narrative is constructed against the tendency to romanticize Biafran history, albeit circuitously. Framed within this multi-directional representation, all four novels reflect the necessity of a complex understanding of identity in general and black femininity in particular.

Walker's critical stance toward the practice of female genital cutting, contextualized specifically in Africa in the narrative, has been interpreted by many critics as sensationalism, cultural imperialism and misrepresentation of Africa. Echoing the anti-black criticism that *Meridian* received during a period when blackness was perceived in exclusive terms, and *Hibiscus*, which has been criticized as un-African due to its gender politics, *Possessing* is situated in a cross-cultural clash of Africanness. Since the novel narrates Tashi's inner journey within the framework of decolonization and migration to the USA, its scholarly critique extends to the international arena, unlike previous novels whose madwomen are positioned in their home-country despite their racial and cross-cultural tension. Walker's status as an African American, that is, a Westerner with African origins, problematizes her criticism of the practice. In an interview with Paula Giddings, who asks Walker about the inevitable criticism for her novel as an imperialist attempt to (mis)represent Africa, Walker justifies her thematic exploration of female genital cutting through her consanguinity of Africa.² However, critics, especially of African origin, define Walker's stance as unilateral and essentialist. Oyěwùmí regards her attitude toward female genital cutting as "an evangelizing mission" that positions Walker within the tradition of neo-Western feminism rather than her womanism (2003: 159). This deliberate distinction between Western feminism and Walker's womanism prevalent in her other works, which is considered absent in *Possessing* by many scholars, puts her within the hegemonic structure of the West's attempt to save Africa from itself.³

² Walker claims ownership of her maternal ancestry and answers Giddings as follows: "As far as I'm concerned, I am speaking for my great-great-great-great-grandmother who came here with all this pain in her body. Think about it. In addition to having been captured, put in the hull of a ship, packed like sardines, put on the auction block, in addition to her children being sold, she being raped, in addition to all of this, she might have been genitally mutilated. I can't stand it! I would go nuts if this part of her story weren't factored in. Imagine if men came from Africa with their penises removed. Believe me, we would have many a tale about it" (2010: 128). The literary representation of the practice for Walker functions as part of the larger project of the deconstruction of romanticized Africa at the expense of promulgating Western stereotypes, as seen in Gay Wilentz's review, who argues that Walker succumbs to "voyeurism" in her novel (1993: 16).

³ In opposition to this viewpoint, critics Zohreh Ramin and Farshid Nowrouzi claim that Walker's interest in Tashi results from her concern for all the misogynistic performances around the world rather than imperialistic maternalism. According to Ramin and Nowrouzi, Walker's policy of womanism makes her an insider and lets her "feel at one with the repressed African women who are black and systematically raped just as the black Walker" (2017: 85). It is important to note that, along with Walker's condemnation and negative representation of Africa, she draws attention to some Western practices such as changing breasts, noses, weight and shape and warns against the possibility

In a similar vein, scholar L. Amede Obiora underscores the dichotomous construction of the West and Africa in the novel, a narratorial choice that feeds from the misrepresentation of Africa in Western media which offers a perverted depiction of the continent “as a jungle inhabited by human beings who are hardly distinguishable from beasts” (1997: 56). The imaginary community of Olinka in the novel is interpreted as the homogenization of the whole continent where only some African societies practice female genital cutting: “How and why does female circumcision, which is not practiced by many African cultures, become the defining characteristic of Africanness?” (Oyěwùmí, 2003: 166). Likewise, Wilentz underlines the oversimplification of Walker’s imaginary Olinka, which is claimed to be located in West Africa in *The Color Purple* and East Africa in *Possessing* as much as the language variation of the novel, where Tashi speaks Yoruba and Swahili “in the same breath” (1993: 16). Contextualized within this highly polemical academic assessment, *Possessing* posits the literary depiction of madness on a broader cultural framework in which the practices that give communities a sense of self and belonging inaugurate discussions of homogeneous/heterogeneous (molar and molecular) identity, dynamic and static (rhizomatic and arborescent) understanding of tradition, and the function of madness as a means to shed light on as well as to subvert these dualistic paradigms.

4.1. Female Genital Cutting in Africa, and the Colonial, Human Rights, Feminist Discourses

Portraying Tashi’s experience of madness inextricably linked to the cultural ritual of an imaginary African community and the counter-narrative of the West through Tashi’s migration to the USA, *Possessing* posits female genital cutting (FGC) in a convergent concatenation of discourses ranging from colonial to human rights and feminism. The ritual is mainly performed throughout Africa, particularly in the sub-Saharan region along with some communities in Oman, Yemen, the

of Westerners to “assume that genital mutilation is more foolish and ‘barbaric’ than the stuff they do” (Walker and Parmar, 1996: 10).

United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Pakistan regardless of their religious affiliations (Muslim, Christian, Jewish and atheist) (Boddy, 2007: 48). Due to the migration of some FGC practicing communities, the ritual also extends to the West, creating an international and intercultural predicament of the applicability of the ritual in terms of culture, health and gender politics. Between 100 and 140 million girls and women—four percent of the global female population—have been estimated to go through FGC, adding approximately three million girls each year (Bekers, 2010: 4). There are mainly three types of the practice: “circumcision or sunna,” which refers to the removal of prepuce or the hood of the clitoris; “excision or clitoridectomy,” which indicates the removal of the clitoris and all or part of the labia minora; and “infibulation or Pharaonic,” which is the removal of the clitoris, labia minora and much of the labia majora (Walker and Parmar, 1996: 367).⁴ This broad range of ethnic groups, locations, religions and cultures unequivocally eventuate conflicting, but also complementary, narratives in the dialogical construction of cultural femininity.

The justifications offered for the ritual are evaluated in multifarious ways by various groups and individuals, depending on their point of ideological stance. Some of the well-known motives are the preservation of virginity of the unmarried or divorced female (Thiam, 1991: 70); purification of the feminine element as seen in Dogon cosmogony where both sexes entail androgyny and their masculinity/femininity is ascertained only through the rite of passage, that is, circumcising the male element in female and female in male (*Ibid.*, 67); suppression of sexual urges such as masturbation (Kenyatta, 1965: 162); and the societal

⁴ Infibulation is the most contentious type of FGC and mostly called “female genital mutilation” by anti-FGC advocates such as Walker. In this operation, the remaining sides of the vulva are stitched together to close up the genital organ, leaving only a small opening, preserved with slivers of wood or matchsticks, for urination and menstruation (Walker and Parmar, 1996: 367). Some of the reported risks include hemorrhage and severe pain (possibly leading to shock and death); septicemia and tetanus (Boddy, 2007: 49). Performed mostly under unhygienic conditions, maternal and infant death has been reported as well as a risk of brain damage to the child (*Ibid.*). Infibulation is also controversial due to the pain it inflicts on the female in sexual intercourse, to the extent that a sharp scalpel or razor is needed to make it possible on the first night (El Saadawi, 2015: 22). *Possessing*, too, presents FGC in the form of infibulation and contextualizes the psychological and physical risks within the narrative of madness.

silencing of women.⁵ However, scholar Joyce Russell-Robinson warns against the categorization of FGC as one isolated occurrence since the operation is performed in a larger sociocultural and educational framework where the female is taught childcare, food preparation and social mannerisms necessary for communal life (1997: 55). Similarly, the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, accentuates the communal importance of the ritual, which is at the core of the moral code of the Gikuyu, and educates girls about how to behave in society (1965: 111). Defying homogeneity, these variations necessitate an approach that prioritizes the cultural and historical specificities of the practice rather than engaging in oversimplified generalizations.

FGC, a ritual through which some African cultures define themselves, is considered to be one of the exemplifications of cultural, to borrow Gayatri Spivak's term, untranslatability between the colonizer and the colonized. In his anthropological work *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta enunciates the social, cultural and religious importance of the ritual, which symbolizes "the unification of the whole [tribe]" (1965: 134). Missionaries, however, regarded the practice as barbaric, anti-Christian and anti-Western. After several failed attempts to abolish the custom, the Church of Scotland Mission issued an order in 1929 for the Gikuyu of Kenya to abandon any adherence to this gender ritual. It would otherwise be practiced at the expense of forsaking missionary schools, which, as examined in the previous chapter, provided the basis of the power structure in colonial Africa. Portraying the practice in a very unfavorable light for the native cultures, the colonialists constructed a counter-culture against the purportedly barbaric traditions through the ritual and utilized it as a means to justify Western intervention.⁶ This exclusive

⁵ Bekers accentuates this aspect of the ritual by pointing out to the ritual song of the Mbakwas-Manjas in colonial central Africa. The lyrics reflect the psychosocial elimination of the female's voice: "Before, you freely disposed over your body / Today you owe me obedience . . . / And you will comply, since you have no more mouth to complain with" (2010: 10). Egyptian feminist and author Nawal El Saadawi associates the operation with the brainwashing of girls as a "calculated merciless campaign to paralyse their capacity to think and to judge and to understand" (2015: 12). The physical ritual and its sociocultural effects are, thus, closely intertwined.

⁶ Spivak's evaluation of the Indian ritual of *sati* (widow immolation) in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* might be pertinent here. Discussing the colonial context of the ritual, which became a contentious issue, Spivak underscores the power relations inherent in such debates, where "saving brown women

counter-identity of the West and the opportunistic motives of the colonizers, in turn, strengthened the importance of FGC as the marker of ethnic and cultural differences of the practicing communities. As Bekers pinpoints, in the colonial discourse, the African female body turns into a “battlefield of two conflicting sets of cultures,” upon which the female body is inscribed (2010: 14). The African female became the means to practice cultural and national power over the counter-identity of each group, both of which maintained a discourse of exclusion.

The cultural clash between colonial Africa and the West is reiterated by the human rights discourse at the end of the twentieth century. In 1979, a conference held by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Sudan brought the issue onto the global realm of human rights. After a 1984 seminar in Senegal, the Inter-African Committee (IAC) was formed to fight against FGC, which is labeled one of four “harmful traditional practices,” turning a once private matter into (inter)national gaze (Hernlund and Shell-Duncan, 2007: 13). At the 1993 Vienna World Conference, FGC became classified as a form of violence against women. It fell under the international human rights law for the first time. Quoting Elisabeth Boyle, scholars Ylva Hernlund and Bettina Shell-Duncan underline the imperial nuances of global concern for the health conditions of African girls and women, for the health discourse conceals the compromise of sovereign autonomy of African countries that the international intervention into national politics brings about (*Ibid.*).⁷ Whereas feminist scholar Joy Ngozi Ezeilo regards the application of human rights as an opportunity to ban the ritual through rationalization (2005: 233), cultural anthropologist Richard A. Shweder criticizes liberal Westerners who are too hasty to

from brown men” is eventuated into the signifier that determines what a good society is as well as the determination of the boundary between crime and ritual (2010: 93-4).

⁷ Ironically, even though lack of sanitary conditions in the operation adds to the health risks, most of the anti-FGC advocates repudiate medicalization of the ritual, for it is considered that it “violates professional ethics of the medical profession,” “legitimizes and perhaps encourages the practice,” and “hinders or undermines interventions designed to eliminate the practice” (Hernlund and Shell-Duncan, 2007: 22). The international concern for the human rights of African girls and women fall under the exclusive rhetoric, which perpetuates the controversy further. Moreover, many scholars have pointed out Western aesthetic operations that are considered ‘modern’ as opposed to the barbaric undertones of FGC for oppressed, backward and mutilated African women. Entailing health risks and driven by a similar desire to fit into the image of the ‘ideal’ woman, African and Western operations such as aesthetic surgeries, including genital operations, face-lifts, silicone breast implants and liposuction, are not culture-free. For a more detailed discussion, please see Shweder (2000), Grande (2005), Boddy (2007) and Ahmadu (2007).

judge and label FGC in unfavorable terms. Pointing out to the lack of reliable evidence and the commonality of sensational testimonies, second-hand reports and inadequate samples, which promulgate the image of African parents mutilating, torturing and maiming their daughters, Shweder underscores the importance of tolerance for alternative ways of life and the need for the contextualization of foreign cultural practices (2000: 218). In parallel with Shweder, who exemplifies the unreliability of the health claims regarding FGC through Amnesty International, Hernlund and Shell-Duncan underscore the credibility gap in the medical discourses of the anti-FGC policies, which have been exaggerated and later called a ‘mistake’ by UNICEF (2007: 14). Janice Boddy also propounds that most of the anti-FGC arguments represent the ritual out of its context and mute the very victims they try to empower since their experience is mainly missing unless for horrific effect (2007: 53). Similar to the colonial discourse, the portrayal of FGC in human rights narrative hints at the larger political and sociocultural structure at play, and likewise, requires a bilateral perspective rather than a monologue inaugurated by abstract moral principles and decontextualization of cultural rituals.

In congruence with the international controversy of human rights, Western feminists incorporate the subjugation of African women into the rhetoric of oppressive gender rituals, taking the health stand into the social and cultural dimensions of the practice. The argument that the circumcised or ‘mutilated’ women are put into physical and psychological suffering in sexual intercourse, and are deprived of experiencing sexual fulfillment is closely associated with loss of femininity, agency and self-expression.⁸ Part of this controversy arises from the importance of the clitoris in Western feminist discourse. After the women’s movement in the 1970s, the clitoris was ‘rediscovered’ and became a “symbol of

⁸ It is important to highlight the Western background of the practice to contextualize contemporary reactions against the “de-sexualization” of women through FGC. In Victorian England, Dr. Isaac Baker Brown operated clitoridectomy on women with problems of madness and nymphomania. These women, Showalter argues, were sensitive to the hypocrisy of the Victorian social codes (1987: 76). Witches in the nineteenth century, also, were exposed to clitoridectomy due to their “seductive natures” (Chesler, 1972: 104). In the USA, as recent as the 1940s, clitoridectomies were performed as a treatment for masturbation (Russell-Robinson, 1997: 55). ‘Madness’, that is, sociocultural unconformity, female sexual desire and clitoridectomies are interlocked in the Western construction of the practice.

emancipation from men, marriage, and domestic life” (Shweder, 2000: 233). FGC, supposedly ensuring better sexual pleasure for men especially if the woman is infibulated, is considered to impede sexual fulfillment for the woman whose experience turns into pain and emotional trauma. It is estimated that 90 percent of infibulated women do not experience any form of sexual pleasure (Gordon, 1997: 25). Yet, this clitoris-oriented portrayal of the ideal female sexual experience and femininity imposes the Western ideal as universal for women of various cultures and origins. Russell-Robinson sheds light on the feminist construction of the clitoris at the center of female sexual response, a physiological model created by William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson based on North American subjects (1997: 55). The generalization of local findings and their application to the judgment of foreign cultural conceptions of sexual experience contribute to the gap between the ideals of Western feminism and the reality of African female subjects who go through FGC.

The effects of this monolithic construction of female sexual experience can especially be seen among FGC practicing immigrant communities in the West since their ethnic reality clashes with the ideal femininity of their host countries. Mansura Dopico’s work on infibulated Eritrean women in Melbourne constructs an alternative for female sexuality, which prioritizes “commitment, communication, tenderness and caring” (2007: 244). Correspondingly, R. Elise B. Johansen, in her research on Somali women in Norway, underlines the peripherality of sexual desire in some immigrant women who regard lack of intense sexual desires as liberating since it makes the women less dependent on the man (2007: 274). Ironically, the negative and oversimplified images of circumcised African women in Western media and feminist rhetoric are reported to create anxiety, depression and a sense of unbelonging among immigrants (Ezeilo, 2005: 235), for these individuals are positioned out of female sexual normalcy prevalent in the West. This intercultural clash of sexual experience and expression, similar to previous discourses, pinpoints the necessity of openness for alternative constructions of female sexuality as well as a clear demarcation between culture and universal human values.

The hegemonic and maternalistic approach of the Western feminist discourse inherent in anti-FGC campaigns creates an ambivalent stand for African feminists who agree with the abolition of the practice, but are ill at ease with the ideology of

exclusion in feminist rhetoric.⁹ In an interview with Susan Arndt, Nigerian writer Chikwenye Ogunyemi differentiates between her reactions to FGC in Africa and the West, as the Western feminism deals with the issue voyeuristically and objectifies the African female (Arndt, 2000: 724). In a similar argument, Nigerian-American scholar Obioma Nnaemeka draws attention to the voyeuristic nature of the campaigns, which, she claims, is devoid of respect and dignity for the African female. She regards the exhibition of body parts as “the ultimate violence done to African women” (2001: 173). These African writers refrain from the monolithic recreation of African women who are merely victims since women, as one of the main initiators of the practice, are active participants of culture-making, with the responsibility of its positive and negative implications. The agency of African women, therefore, hints at the double nature of the practice as both empowering and disempowering femininity. Bekers emphasizes these two contrasting images of the excised women as passive victims and active participants and argues that the ambivalent nature of the ritual enables certain groups such as anti-colonials and Western feminists to select only the elements that strengthen their arguments, albeit on opposite ends (2010: 13). Contextualized within this political and sociocultural framework, *Possessing* problematizes these discourses inherent in the ritual of FGC. By doing so, it creates an intertextual dialogue with the previously examined novels, all of which center around the question of the cultural construction of the idealized black femininity and the need for internal transformation enabled through madness.

4.2. A Silent Acquiescence: Madness through Cultural and Intercultural Constructions of the Black Female Body

Positioned in this polemical international and intercultural context, *Possessing* narrates the festering trauma of Tashi, also known as Evelyn, who goes through female genital cutting and experiences madness through various interlocking

⁹ For example, French ethnologist Annie de Villeneuve analyzes Somali women as follows: “It is not that they are foolish, but that they are not yet civilized, they are incapable of reason, so that their heads do not tell them that it is wrong to perpetuate this instinct for cruelty which underlies their actions” (qtd. in Thiam, 1991: 77). Awa Thiam challenges this imperialistic attitude, even though the overall content of her book *Speak Out, Black Sisters* centers around African female re-assertion against the harmful implications of the practice.

factors, rendering her body “a site for gendered readings of post-colonial subjectivity” (Ashcroft et al., 2008: 166). By doing so, the novel explores madness in ways that foreground the black female body in the construction of postcolonial subjectivity. Unlike previous novels where the experience of female madness is contextualized within the larger political tension of ethnic wars (*Yellow Sun*), liberty movements (*Meridian*) and religious clashes (*Hibiscus*), *Possessing* follows a more overt trajectory in its examination of the female psyche through the direct politicization of female body. Situating the gendered African body at the core of its narrative, the novel utilizes Tashi’s culturally inscribed body as the nexus of the psychological dimension of postcoloniality. In their discussion of the body as a textual device to reveal the power structures for the postcolonial subject, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin regard the body as a text where subjectivity is felt “material and permanent” (*Ibid.*). *Possessing* takes this materiality of the female body and merges it within the incorporeality of madness. The exteriority implied through the body is blurred by the privacy of Tashi’s bodily difference, as it is located in a private feminine sphere. Interweaving the visibility of the body and the invisibility of Tashi’s difference, Walker subverts the fixed relation between internal and external transformation, and extends body politics to the madness narrative. Even though all four novels delineate madness in conjunction with the need to mediate between inner and outer worlds, the centralization of the female body as a zone of difference and transformation in *Possessing* creates a more tangible link between exteriority and interiority for the madwoman who, to borrow Fanon’s words, occupies a “shaky position” (2008: 55). Offering a more feminized context within this body politics, the novel constructs madness as a reflection of the inability to create bridges between seemingly opposing and exclusively homogeneous discourses of culture, identity and gender.

As common in black women’s mad writing, *Possessing* is structured in a circle of multi-layered narratives that refute one-dimensional representation. Echoing *Hibiscus* in its application of the first-person narrative, the novel underscores the black female subjectivity that is otherwise muted in the larger social structures. Yet, the liminality of femininity, unlike previous novels that present it through the thematic unifier of in-betweenness, is reflected by the fragmented selves of the

madwoman; the chapters focalizing Tashi are named “Tashi,” “Evelyn,” “Tashi-Evelyn,” “Evelyn-Tashi,” “Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson,” and “Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul.” Each name and its different combinations emphasize particular aspects of Tashi’s identity, thereby mirror the multi-dimensionality of her madness and centralize the fragmentation of her sense of self. Tashi’s selves are further accompanied by other characters of different genders, racial and cultural backgrounds. Same events and situations are voiced and presented by the monologues of various characters in each chapter. The consolidation of these monologues incorporates Tashi’s subjectivity into the collective intersubjectivity. The inclusion of Tashi’s fragmented selves into the multiple perspectives of other characters foregrounds her experience of madness as a sane reaction to the maddening discourse of exclusion prevalent in the communal perception of African femininity in various settings and cultures.¹⁰ As can be seen in Walker’s dedication note to “the Blameless Vulva,” the novel pointedly presents a feminist premise. In this light, Tashi and her gendered experience of madness are centralized within the multiplicity of voices wherein her liminal position is subverted more overtly than the previously analyzed characters.

The multiple monologues of the novel concurrently critique and perpetuate monolithic representations of culture and female subjectivity through madness. Critic Stephen Souris situates *Possessing* within the tradition of the multiple narrator novel inaugurated by William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* and Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*. Drawing attention to the common tendency to reflect disagreement through intense interiority and relativistic epistemology in multiple narrator mode, Souris differentiates Walker’s agenda in *Possessing* as the construction of agreement over monologues in its non-relativistic premise (1997: 419). Even though Souris’ argument sheds light on the novel’s interpolation of juxtaposed perspectives into Tashi’s subjectivity, which validates her narrative, his celebration of Walker’s

¹⁰ Walker’s utilization of intersubjectivity for the depiction of Tashi’s madness reminisces *Meridian* where she again incorporates the intersubjectivity of numerous females into the narrative, thereby converging Meridian’s madness with the larger oppression of African American women. However, rather than presenting other dimensions of female subjugation, *Possessing* utilizes intersubjectivity to bear witness specifically to Tashi’s maddening experience, thus creates, not diversity, but a unity out of the multiplicity of perspectives.

application of the multiple narrator mode to create a dialogical tension overlooks the hierarchical construction of dualisms in the novel. Whereas *Possessing*, similar to *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, offers more than one focalizer, the multiplicity of perspectives constructs a hierarchical duality of Africa, the oppressive continent, and the West, its point of comparison. Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the Tree and different root systems can be construed as a starting point to reveal the complexity and ambiguity of representation in the novel. Deleuze and Guattari, as an alternative to the dichotomous root system, postulate the taproot structure where the binary of the former is replaced by biunivocal relationships between "successive circles" (2005: 5). Tashi's fragmented selves, mainly different variations of Tashi, her African self, and Evelyn, her American self, repudiate the one-rootedness of her madness since each variation pinpoints different aspects of the clash between inner and outer worlds. Likewise, the monologues of other characters construct interconnectedness and multiple voices at the same time. However, the rhizomatic structure of *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, which incessantly refuses to trace madness back to one source, is de-emphasized and blurred in *Possessing*. Even though the narrative offers a multiplicity of voices, these voices are constituted in a biunivocal relationship, where a pivotal taproot supports the secondary roots and still leads to a single unity (*Ibid.*). That is, in its multi-perspectival structure, *Possessing* traces Tashi's madness back to a dualistic paradigm, the foundation of which is based on an allegedly African gender ritual, and thus differs from the previously examined novels in its attempt to hold the West as a point of comparison, thereby shifting the narrative from biunivocal to binary roots that the experience of madness perpetually tries to expose and contest.

In close connection with the other novels, *Hibiscus* in particular, *Possessing* contextualizes madness within the discourse of cultural, religious and gendered difference. Adichie's portrayal of the pre-colonial Igbo history and the subsequent clashes of Western Christian culture with African religious and communal values position Beatrice in a postcolonial community which has specifically alienated the female subject due to the privileges given to the male. Walker, on the other hand, reverses this dynamism, and instead portrays the fictional Olinkan community as more patriarchal than the Christian missionaries. Unlike Beatrice who experiences

alienation because she is distanced from her communal values and religion, Tashi is depicted as an outsider among Olinkans because of her friendship with the black missionaries. She is “never trusted,” and “considered a potential traitor” (*PSJ*, 96). Here, the novel takes a different route from *Hibiscus* in its exploration of the colonial encounter. By depicting Tashi as an outsider in her own community through her conversion to Christianity and her constructive interaction with black missionaries, who are Celie’s family in *the Color Purple*, the novel delineates the conversion as a dynamic space free from the traditional gendered rituals of the Olinkans.¹¹ As a fictional construction of the African continent, Olinkan society is highly dependent on the communal relations where the tribe is considered “one organic whole” (Kenyatta, 1965: 271). The act of conversion within this organic whole is perceived to be “a complete disassociation of oneself from one’s world, which consequently meant a loss of one’s sociocultural privileges and identity” (Udeani, 2007: 113). Both *Hibiscus* and *Possessing* draw attention to the importance of communal unity and the alienating dimension of conversion, which leads to madness. However, whereas *Hibiscus* focalizes the colonized and offers heterogeneous construction of the Christian Igbo identity as a plausible solution, *Possessing* prioritizes the multiple voices of the African American missionaries, Western observers and psychiatrists in a comparative manner to the Olinkan community. Even though both novels posit madness between this cultural clash of well-defined molar segments, *Possessing* does not construct a heterogeneous alternative; the segments remain unmerged. Tashi’s madness, triggered by her alienation from her society, is thus situated in a dichotomous binary between the homogeneous and static Olinkan community and heterogeneously represented Western Christians.

¹¹ Still, it would be an oversimplification to indicate that the novel depicts Christianity in solely positive terms. Even though Walker’s liberating reconfiguration of Christian missionaries subverts the common African argument about the debilitating and misogynistic effects of Christian conversion in Africa, *Possessing* reveals a different gender politics of religion in Europe. Lisette, an ‘enlightened’ Frenchwoman whose self-actualization differs highly from that of Tashi, claims “I could not reconcile the word “obedience” that the bride says in the church wedding with any kind of spiritual or physical expansion for myself” (*PSJ*, 37). Unlike *Hibiscus*, which examines the ambivalent effects of Christianity in Africa through Beatrice’s alienation, *Possessing* creates a dichotomy between Western Christianity and African traditions, the latter of which is questioned only within the power dynamism of gender politics among Westerners. While the novel celebrates Lisette’s assertive stance against a patriarchal religion, it denigrates the Olinkan community’s rejection of its values.

The clash between Western culture, epitomized through the African American missionaries in the novel, and the imagined African community, Olinkans, bring into focus the interconnection between the normative formations of Olinkan femininity, Tashi's overt sexuality and her madness. Walker portrays her protagonist, who is influenced by the missionaries, as an independent, self-possessed and sexually expressive woman whose expression of her femininity contradicts and challenges the patriarchal norms of the Olinkans, which perpetuates her liminal position. Her future husband Adam, an African American missionary, calls her "a flashy, succulent fruit" (*PSJ*, 34). This sexual and dynamic image is strengthened further by their sexual intercourse in the fields that are considered to be sacred and taboo for the Olinkans. Tashi's liminal subjectivity, shaped by sexual assertiveness and overtness, is constructed against the definition of Olinkan femininity marked by female genital cutting. Her culturally non-inscribed body stands out among other Olinkan women and renders her an outsider:

Certainly to all my friends who'd been circumcised, my uncircumcised vagina was thought to be a monstrosity. They laughed at me. Jeered at me for having a tail. I think they meant my labia majora. After all, none of them had vaginal lips; none of them had a clitoris; they had no idea what these things looked like; to them I was bound to look odd (*PSJ*, 95-6).

Here, Walker merges exteriority with interiority in her examination of monolithic constructions of femininity and its contribution to madness. Tashi's body, untouched by the patriarchal ritual, is portrayed to be free from sexual restraints and condemned not only by men but also by women. As in all the novels examined in the study, the preservation of patriarchy is maintained by both genders, which exacerbates the otherness of the female outsider. Similar to *Meridian*, Walker connects Tashi's sense of alienation and concomitant madness with other forms of gendered resistance. It is, for example, later mentioned in the novel by M'Lissa, the circumciser, that the uncircumcised 'witches' were put to death by Olinkans since they were too powerful to be left free. Tashi's association with the intimidating witches underscores the otherness of the unrestrained female, which reminisces Olanna's sexual freedom and labeling as a witch in *Yellow Sun*. Furthermore, uncircumcised nomad women whose sexual freedom is repeatedly emphasized in the

novel are also considered a danger. By incorporating Tashi's bodily otherness and sexuality into the narratives of other alienated women, Walker interlocks their subjugation. The dynamic structure of sexuality common in all those women epitomizes Deleuze and Guattari's association of desire with rhizomatic segments. Exerting mobility, self-expression and desire rather than being trapped in an arborescent system, Tashi's liminality, followed by her madness, becomes a means of resistance against a homogeneous and static conception of femininity.

In its portrayal of the madwoman, *Possessing* interlocks the ethnic crisis of *Yellow Sun*, the cultural nationalism of *Meridian* and conflicting cultural ideologies of *Hibiscus* within the sociopolitical framework of decolonization. Tashi's liminal position is purportedly mediated through female genital cutting, a ritual considered the "only remaining definitive stamp of Olinka tradition" (*PSJ*, 58). Similar to *Meridian* whose body repudiates the idealized image of the black virgin of the Black Power Movement, Walker positions Tashi in the homogeneous discourse of cultural nationalism of the Olinka. In *The Body in Pain*, scholar Elaine Scarry claims that when a society is in a "crisis of belief," the material factualness of the human body is utilized to give the cultural construct the aura of "realness" and "certainty" (1987: 14). *Possessing* reflects a period of cultural crisis at the backdrop of the anti-colonial struggle for national sovereignty. The narrative opts for the circumcised African female body to reflect the utilization of the body regarded as an essential part of the cultural construct of communal unification in Scarry's conceptualization of belonging. The circumcised body of Olinkan women indicates a pure Olinkan identity in opposition to the Western norms of femininity, inscribing the female body to be the signifier of difference and national control. Tashi's identity is homogenized within the national crisis that inculcates female genital cutting as the only way to be "Completely woman. Completely African. Completely Olinka" (*PSJ*, 58-59). The molar segments of gender, continental identity and nationality ("woman," "African," "Olinka") are correlated in a way Deleuze and Guattari call "continuity of territories" (2005: 195). These contiguous segments of Tashi's identity are shaped by the arborescent conceptualization of difference, which is based on "filiation" rather than the rhizomatic "alliance" (*Ibid.*, 35). As in all dichotomous systems of thought, womanhood, Africanness and Olinkanness are based on an exclusive duality. By

equating these segments with one another, *Possessing* reveals the monolithic and homogeneous construction of the identity politics championed by the patriarchal nationalism of Olinkans; complete womanhood, Africanness and Olinkanness are sustained only through female genital cutting.¹² Since Tashi's expression of femininity is positioned in this homogeneous cultural construct, her identity refuses the rhizomatic conjunctions of "and. . . and. . .and," meaning she cannot be uncircumcised *and* African *and* woman at the same time. Her inability to mediate between seemingly opposing facets of her identity creates a contrast against the more flexible and rhizomatic direction *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* designate for their madwomen; the rigid binarism inherent in Tashi's conceptualization of her sense of self, thus, echoes more of Beatrice's inability to negotiate her divided inner and outer worlds and subsequent experience of the black hole.

Similar to previously examined works, *Possessing* molecularizes the exclusive molar segments of society that incessantly entrap Tashi. Echoing the disillusionment of Olanna and Meridian resulting from the clarity of molecular perception, Walker deconstructs the gratification of female genital cutting as a noble means of the recapitulation of national and cultural identity. Tashi's imagination of women in the liberation camp who "seemed terribly bold, terribly revolutionary and free" is refuted by the narrative through Tashi's own debilitating experience (*PSJ*, 59). Within various monologues of Tashi, Adam and Olivia, Walker repeatedly makes a distinction between Tashi's demeanor before and after the ritual. Tashi emphasizes the death of her formerly vivid eyes, which now seem to hide "behind an iron door" (*Ibid.*, 46); Adam regards her eyes "as flat as eyes that have been painted in, and with dull paint" (*Ibid.*, 45), while Olivia senses "a mortal blow" in them (*Ibid.*, 60). The novel's subtle construction of Tashi's deterioration is strengthened later in the narrative in contrast to Western women whose bodies are not exposed to

¹² Ironically, the novel offers a different facet for the liberation camp that is glorified as a 'pure' Olinkan community in Tashi's distorted perception. Thanks to the multiple narrator structure, Walker gives a more acute description of the camp through Adam, who observes, "these freedom fighters were obviously from different parts of Africa. There was even, I was to learn later, a European woman, a European man and several American blacks of both sexes in the camp" (*PSJ*, 43). This heterogeneous structure of the liberation camp subverts the purity of Olinkan struggle that permeates the national rhetoric in the novel and renders Tashi's experience of female genital cutting into an illusionary attempt to create well-defined, exclusive segments where there is none.

patriarchal inscription: Lisette is described to have “limpid” eyes (*Ibid.*, 80) whereas Raye has “large, clear eyes” (*Ibid.*, 95). By situating Tashi’s experience of female genital cutting in the midst of national turmoil, Walker de-contextualizes the highly valued ritual which is considered to lead the circumcised to be reborn as “the child of the tribe” (Kenyatta, 1965: 51). Yet, this de-contextualization of the practice subverts the construction of African femininity as the carrier of the survival of indigenous cultures, which indicates the possession of power in the cultural sphere (Bekers, 2010: 16). Reflected in Tashi’s dead eyes, *Possessing* posits the monolithic understanding of femininity, embedded in the female genital cutting ritual, at the center of Tashi’s disillusionment, or in Deleuzoguattarian terms, “molecular perception,” where “it is hard to tell who is who anymore, or what anything means” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 195). The clear-cut distinction between the oppressed (Olinka) and the oppressor (the West) is blurred and molecularized. As common in mad writing, the elimination of formerly well-defined dichotomous structures eventuates into the manifestation of madness. In parallel with Julia Kristeva’s analysis of excrement and its equivalents (infection, disease, decay, etc) as a danger to identity from without, and menstruation from within (1982: 71), Walker narrates Tashi’s debilitating experience through the subtle descriptions of her odor, excrement and period.¹³ Emphasizing Tashi’s menstrual blood in the midst of the turmoil, she sheds light on Tashi’s inner crisis where her sense of national and gendered self is shattered and muted within the newly gained awareness of subjugation.

In conjunction with all the novels examined earlier, *Possessing* engages in the textual construction of spatial segments in an attempt to offer different perspectives of the liminality of the black female who is stuck within a homogeneous conception of the self. Yet, as mentioned in the narratorial analysis, *Possessing* follows a more arborescent trajectory in its narrative than a rhizomatic one. *Yellow Sun* situates Olanna in various settings with exclusive constructions of cultural identity, but distinguishes Kano as a heterogeneous space that facilitates Olanna’s line of flight.

¹³ Finding Tashi in the liberation camp circumcised, Adam realizes a hole dug for Tashi to be used as her personal latrine, and that “She was on her moons” (*PSJ*, 57). The novel also draws attention to the flies around Tashi and the odor. Through this grotesque image of the newly circumcised Tashi, the narrative challenges the glorification of the practice and its significance in the struggle for independence, both of which are inscribed on Tashi’s body and psyche.

Meridian also posits the title character in various spatial categories, one of which provides, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, a rhizomatic space that nourishes Meridian's creation of a heterogeneous identity; *Hibiscus* delineates Nsukka as the locus of the negotiation of seemingly contradictory ideologies. All these texts reflect the dynamic relationship between the self and location, and render the inner transformation of their characters tangible. *Possessing* follows a similar construction of space by switching back and forth between Tashi's identity within Olinka and her migration to the USA. Yet, rather than creating a heterogeneous space for inner transformation between these locations, the novel situates Tashi's culturally inscribed body and concomitantly, wounded psyche, in a nexus of difference through which the West observes and measures Africa. As opposed to Kano in *Yellow Sun*, the South in *Meridian* and Nsukka in *Hibiscus*, *Possessing* perpetuates Tashi's sense of alienation in an only-allegedly "heterogeneous" place. Devoid of the embracing acceptance and heterogeneity of the spatial territories of the earlier works, the West in the novel is constructed against Africa through the female body, which is transformed into a "site for representation and control" (Ashcroft et al., 2008: 166). In the *Color Purple* excerpt at the beginning of the novel, regarding Tashi's decision to go through female genital cutting, Olivia declares: "I told her nobody in America or Europe cuts off pieces of themselves" (PSJ, 13). American and European identity is constructed against the ritual. Female genital cutting, therefore, becomes the decisive factor for the discourse of exclusion indicated for the bodies that differ from the Western perception of normalcy. By interlocking Tashi's experience of the ritual and subsequent madness, the narrative converges the politics of body and mind as well as exteriority and interiority, all of which play a significant role in the creative potential, or lack thereof, of the line of flight.

Set in two continents, *Possessing* engages with the conception of homogeneity and heterogeneity of black femininity through the emphasis of bodily difference. The concern of the previous novels to mediate conflicting aspects of identity is portrayed in a cycle of corporeal images of sexuality in *Possessing*. As in all the other novels examined earlier, female sexuality becomes the locus of cultural tension and the challenge of heterogeneity through which madness is constructed and manifested. Whereas all the chapters focalizing Tashi prior to her giving birth are

either called “Tashi” or “Evelyn,” therefore creating two separate identities based on their point of departure, the monologues concerning her birth-giving are named “Evelyn-Tashi” and “Tashi-Evelyn” for the first time in the narrative. By utilizing Tashi’s purportedly heterogeneous, hyphenated selves as the very basis of her excluded difference, Walker sheds light on the centrality of the body and its restrictions for the creation of a rhizomatic identity. Rather than portraying the birth scene in a celebratory light, the novel reflects grotesque images of otherness. The discrepancy between Tashi’s culturally inscribed African body and the reality of a new culture is exemplified by the exaggerated process of the birth where Tashi’s obstetrician breaks two instruments trying to create an opening for the baby and later uses a scalpel and a pair of scissors that are meant to sever cartilage from bone. The novel presents this ‘abnormality’ of her body as the target for the Western gaze by giving voice to Tashi and her objectified African body:

No matter how sick I became during the pregnancy, I attended myself. I could not bear the thought of the quick-stepping American nurses looking at me as if I were some creature from beyond their imaginings. In the end, though, I was that creature. For even as I gave birth, a crowd of nurses, curious hospital staff and medical students gathered around my bed. For days afterward doctors and nurses from around the city and for all I know around the state came by to peer over the shoulder of my doctor as he examined me. There was also the question of what to do with “the hole,” as I overheard him call it, making no attempt to be euphemistic for my sake (*PSJ*, 55).

Walker foregrounds the birth scene to substantiate the impossibility of the integration of the circumcised African body into Western culture. The dynamic potential of birth turns into a tangible manifestation of static African womanhood. Tashi’s newly-emerged American self indicated in the naming of the chapters does not conjugate with her African body. Her otherness, hidden behind her American self “Evelyn,” is exposed, leaving both the Americanized African, Evelyn-Tashi and African American, Tashi-Evelyn outside the norms of acceptance that are prevalent in her host country.

The novel's portrayal of Tashi's displaced body as the object of the Western gaze¹⁴ echoes the much-debated issue of sexuality between the West and Africa. Oyěwùmí, for instance, makes a distinction between the African and Western constructions of femininity, the latter of which indicates "a body-based identity" where womanhood is constructed on a biological basis. The shocked and intrigued observers at the hospital can be construed as a re-creation of the nineteenth-century freak shows of Europe where a twenty-five-year-old South African woman, Sarah Bartmann was exhibited for Europeans in London and Paris due to her genitalia and buttocks. In *Difference and Pathology*, Sander Gilman analyzes the attempt to differentiate Western and African sexuality through Bartmann whose diminishment to just a "collection of sexual parts" was utilized to justify the separation of races (1994: 88). The cultural normalcy of female genital cutting in Olinka eventuates into displacement and alienation in the USA. It is particularly important that the novel underscores Tashi's conflicting selves in the process of birth-giving since the process itself indicates a threshold between "inside and outside, ego and other, life and death" (Kristeva, 1982: 15). Rather than interlocking these polarities, Tashi's circumcised body widens the gap between the inside and outside, ego and other, life and death. In her examination of physical pain, Elaine Scarry, too, accentuates the interiority and exteriority inherent in bodily pain processes, which brings with it "solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety, all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibility for camaraderie or shared experience" (1987: 53). Tashi's physical pain, combined with her bodily otherness, exposes her to the American public gaze without any sense of solidarity or belonging. By merging the Western exclusion of the African female body with the ubiquitous human experience of physical pain through female genital cutting, the novel discloses the exclusive and arborescent nature of both cultures. However, *Possessing* is not completely free from the body based identity mentioned above. It entraps Tashi within the homogeneous structures of identity in an international context and

¹⁴ It might be argued that, by incorporating the Western gaze over the black body into mad writing, Walker creates a relationality of otherness with other African American texts such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, thereby expanding Tashi's liminality as a mad African woman to that of African American characters in black women's writing.

contrasts it with another birth scene in the novel which concerns the French woman, Lisette. Unlike Tashi's painful and alienating experience, Lisette's birth-giving is blessed with self-actualization and liberation:

I had the most sought-after midwife in France—my competent and funny aunt Marie-Therese, whose radical idea it was that childbirth above all should feel sexy. I listened to nothing but gospel music during my pregnancy, a music quite new to me, and to France, and “It’s a High Way to Heaven” (“...nothing can walk up there, but the pure in heart...”) was playing on the stereo during the birth; the warmth of the singers’ voices a perfect accompaniment to the lively fire in the fireplace. My vulva oiled and massaged to keep my hips open and my vagina fluid, I was orgasmic at the end. Petit Pierre practically slid into the world at the height of my amazement, smiling serenely even before he opened his eyes (*PSJ*, 82).

The heterogeneity indicated in Tashi's location is re-created in France through the combination of Lisette's maternal heritage and the application of the gospel songs, which are associated with African American expressions of religiosity. The broken instruments of Tashi's experience are replaced by the ease and dynamism of the gospel songs.¹⁵ Free from the clear-cut and dichotomous segments of molarity, the insertion of music illustrates the deconstruction of rigid categories of race and gender, for music is a decisive “deterritorializing force” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 302). The celebration of female sexuality, maternal guidance and independence of the female suggested through Lisette subvert the Western condemnation of African sexuality. By reversing Tashi and Lisette's expressions of femininity, Walker criticizes African subjugation of women's freedom to experience pleasure; the narrative does not condemn the over-sexualized female as commonly suggested in the colonial discourse of difference. Therefore, unlike the nineteenth-century applications of clitoridectomy in the West to suppress female sexuality, the novel

¹⁵ Walker's exploration of the rivalry and relationship between the black female protagonist and a white woman echoes *Meridian* where the title character is compared and measured against Lynne, a white woman. In both novels, Walker makes use of a love triangle between a black female, black male and a white female in order to explore micro-politics of race and gender. Yet, whereas *Meridian* goes beyond gendered and racial restrictions as opposed to Lynne, *Possessing* reverses the relationship and posits Lisette in a more rhizomatic premise; Tashi remains stuck in the exclusive conceptualization of Africanness and femininity. This overt contrast further exposes Walker's agenda in terms of the arborescent connection between body and madness, and the irreversibility of female genital cutting, which incessantly entraps the black female.

posits Tashi in the opposite end and turns the alleged patriarchal cure into a catalyst for female madness.

The arborescent construction of homogeneity and heterogeneity in the novel can best be examined through the exterior manifestation of the female psyche, that is, the institutionalization of Tashi, and its concomitant silencing in the larger social aggregates. Among all the madwomen of the four works, Tashi is the only one institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital. Transgressing the boundaries between public and private, the narrative politicizes Tashi's madness within the question of cultural difference. In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault regards the confinement of the mad as the suppression of difference (1988: 63). Walker's artistic preference to locate Tashi's institutionalization not in her home country but in the USA reveals the monolithic premise behind the conceptions of race and gender within different cultures, where difference is perceived to be a "deviation" (Parekh, 2000: 49). The narrative distinguishes Tashi's psychological displacement from her physical alienation. Her "white witch doctor" is surrounded by the clay figures of African gods and goddesses and tribal rugs. Yet, these exotic objects are the only acknowledgement of Tashi's otherness, for the white psychiatrist categorizes her as a Negro woman based on her skin color. The contrast between his alleged interest in Africa, reflected through the decorations of his office, and his inability to recognize Tashi's Africanness reveals the lack of recognition of the individuality of the institutionalized black women who are homogenized under the category of 'Negro'. As another institution meant to be a spiritual guide and psychic relief for African Americans, the black church, too, fails to acknowledge Tashi's otherness. Adam dismisses female genital cutting in his congregation as they would be "embarrassed to discuss something so private" (*PSJ*, 200). The liberating force of the black church, exemplified by Lisette's experience of self-actualization through gospel songs, turns into an arborified structure where women's suffering is too 'private' and thus unacknowledged. By underlining Tashi's incongruent interiority (Olinkan) and exteriority (African American), the novel intensifies the misrecognition and the negation of the particularities of the psychic demise manifested in African female subjectivity.

Although the multiple narrator structure interweaves various voices into the portrayal of the USA as a place of freedom and safety, Tashi's madness problematizes its validity. Interestingly, Tashi herself aligns with this image since her multiple selves constantly create a positive image of the USA in a dichotomous contradiction with Olinka. Similar to Beatrice who cannot create a rhizomatic and flexible identity between her Igbo and Christian selves, Tashi is not able to harmonize and negotiate her Africanness with her Americanness; she conceptualizes her identity through an arborescent system of thought, which takes its roots from the "principle of dichotomy" inherent in the Tree (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 212). As the dichotomous Tree in and of itself necessitates homogeneity, Tashi's conceptualization of her Olinkan identity is constructed as un-American and un-European. Likewise, her newly constructed American self repudiates Olinkan values and traditions. Different characters point at her hatred for the Olinkan self embedded in her circumcised body, whose scent she cannot stand, causing her to hide half of the month "virtually buried" (*PSJ*, 60). Just as in Africa where she diminishes the cultural ritual—female genital cutting—to a means of rejecting everything Western, she tries to reach a single, linear and homogeneous identity in the USA by attempting to mutilate her own body: "*Completely unaware of what she was doing, she said, and feeling nothing, she had sliced rings, bloody bracelets, or chains, around her ankles*" [emphasis in the original] (*Ibid.*, 49). Through self-mutilation, she rejects the body inscribed by Olinkan norms of femininity. Even though the monologues focalizing Tashi in her hyphenated selves, Tashi-Evelyn and Evelyn-Tashi indicate a harmonized subjectivity on the surface, the narrative utilizes these combinations only to foreground the contrast between Tashi's fragmented identity and the imaginary harmonization of these clear-cut fragments. In this respect, the cultural clash and dichotomy represented in Tashi's psyche are interwoven into the narrative, where madness occupies a counter-discourse to that of the inclusive American identity indicated by the multiple narrators.

In accordance with this contrast, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish intrinsic multiplicities from extrinsic ones, for the former does not divide without also changing in nature (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 33). Tashi's alleged multiplicity of selves remains extrinsic as she internalizes the arborescent dimensions of both

cultures and constructs each identity in opposition to the other. Her arborescent mentality does not change. Critic Lillian Temu Osaki relates Tashi's madness to her migration and exposure to American culture (2002: 15). In a similar vein, L. Amede Obiora claims that had Tashi stayed in her native culture, she might have found affirmation and sanity rather than "the individualism, narcissism, and racism of the West" (1997: 58). Both arguments shed light on the debilitating effects of migration through which Tashi's madness is exacerbated. However, her madness starts in Africa, where a heterogeneous self is not created due to interlocking, complex elements of patriarchy, colonial encounter and anti-colonialism. By interweaving Tashi's multiple selves into one another through the non-linear narrative, the novel reflects the inter-connectedness of these seemingly different forms of alienation and displacement. In its exploration of the multivalence of madness, *Possessing* engages with the external impositions of homogeneity and exclusion of difference, and the internalization of dichotomies by the madwoman in close relation with the former texts. Whereas *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* create a black female subjectivity that transcends the limited constructions of identity in dualistic paradigms, *Hibiscus* and *Possessing* present a segmented and exclusive sense of self that is manifested both in the external and internal worlds. It, in turn, forms the points of departure within texts in their re-creation of black femininity.

4.3. "Unquestionably mad. Oddly free": Reconstruction of African Femininity and Cultural Identity

Exploring gendered madness through the ritual of female genital cutting and its international implications, *Possessing* posits Tashi's psychic demise at the center of the construction of culture and its expansion to a heterogeneous conception of identity. In *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora* (1992) and *Healing Narratives: Women Writers Curing Cultural Dis-ease* (2000), African American author Gay Wilentz draws attention to the tendency of female writers of African origin, both in Africa and diaspora, to explore the mental breakdown of female characters in places that deprive them of their African heritage

and culture. These texts, which Wilentz regards as ‘healing narratives’, present one’s return to the African heritage and the acknowledgement of African culture to be the cure for psychic demise and spiritual alienation that the characters repeatedly go through (1992: 33). In these healing narratives, the writer and the protagonist replicate the role of the woman as culture-bearer and healer common in African societies (*Ibid.*, 113). *Possessing*, focusing on the same issues of cultural heritage and the female psyche, portrays Tashi’s transition from madness to recovery from the opposite perspective, which requires not a return to, but a deconstruction and reconstruction of the native culture. Radical in its feminist premise like *Hibiscus*, the novel explores the process of inner transformation through external interference (murder), hence, differentiates itself from Wilentz’s healing narratives. Political theorist Bhikhu Parekh enunciates this critical outlook to one’s culture as a necessity for one’s loyalty to one’s heritage since cultures are not unchanging superstructures that entrap culture-creating humans (2000: 122). Rather than re-shaping the diasporic identity through Africanness, the novel re-shapes Africanness through Americanness, thereby presenting the migrant experience as a double-edged sword, one side of which perpetuates alienation, the other a new, multi-layered lens through which the African culture and traditions are re-examined and re-shaped. Separated from *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian* in its radical agenda, *Possessing* emphasizes the creative self-transformative potential of madness in a way contingent on external change. The violent nature of Tashi’s process of recovery problematizes the nature of transformation and agency as well as blurring the lines between formerly exclusive segments of race, gender and cultural identity.

In accordance with Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on “transversal movement”¹⁶ which creates bridges between otherwise unrelated lines or segments (2005: 25), *Possessing* utilizes Tashi’s madness to blur the seemingly unrelated or dichotomous categories of identity in an attempt to construct heterogeneity without

¹⁶ According to Deleuzoguattarian formation of lines, a line of flight, as seen in *Hibiscus*, might lead to a black hole. In order to refrain from this destructive danger of lines of flight, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the need to connect with other lines, which can be called “transversal connections” (2005: 11). The application of transversality in *Possessing* blurs the radicalism of murder and the optimistic interpretation some critics assign to Tashi’s own death later in the novel. For a positive interpretation of Tashi’s end, see Maxine Sample’s “Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,” 2000: 169-172.

dualisms. Unlike the previously examined novels, not only does it concentrate on different cultural forms but also dwells on different locations. This locational variety—Tashi’s migration to the USA—paves the way for the critical outlook Parekh considers essential in the creation of cultures. Walker situates Tashi’s African American psychiatrist Raye as a ‘transversal’ line by which a connection between Africa and the USA is made and sustained. Tashi’s conceptualization of Africanness and Americanness, highly based on exclusive dualisms, are challenged, and the negation of her difference in her host country is attenuated by the transversality manifested in Raye. In her analysis of pain, Elaine Scarry draws attention to the unsharability of pain, which cannot be denied or confirmed since it evokes certainty in the person who is in pain, and doubt in the ones who are not (1987: 13). Yet, this unsharability, Scarry argues, can be mediated by a person who acknowledges or expresses another person’s pain. When the person who is “well and free willingly turns himself into an image of the other’s psychic or sentient claims, an image existing in the space outside the sufferer’s body,” it gives the sufferer a place in the world (*Ibid.*, 50). A strong-willed, independent African American woman, Raye goes through gum mutilation to empathize with Tashi’s allegedly foreign experience of female genital cutting. Bringing Tashi’s negated self outside of her body and rendering it tangible, she connects two conflicting worlds of Africa and the United States that the narrative perpetually constructs in opposition. The ‘foreign’ characteristics of Raye’s assertive femininity are connected to an African healer, as Tashi claims, “Suddenly, in that guise [African healer], Raye became someone I felt I knew; someone with whom I could bond” (*PSJ*, 105). Since all the chapters concerning Tashi’s experience with Raye are named “Evelyn,” which indicates that her fragmented self depicted in these chapters is exclusively American, the re-connection with the African past through the ritualization of empathy transforms Tashi’s experience as an American, namely “Evelyn,” into a heterogeneous reality. In turn, her rejected Africanness is re-contextualized through this reality where Americanness is harmonized with the African past. Just as madness brings together formerly separated categories together in previous novels, *Possessing* disrupts the unrelationality of female bodies and psyche by interlocking the circumcised with the

uncircumcised body. The corporeality of madness formerly separating and polarizing segments eventuates into bridges between culturally heterogeneous femininities.

Tashi's madness breaks down various forms of molar segments previously constructed against one another through Walker's representation of molecular genders and races. Throughout the novel, the exclusive forms of identity, male and female, black and white, African and Western, are dichotomized within the differentiating discourse of Tashi's circumcised body and subsequent mental breakdown. Against the highly patriarchal and hierarchical world she attributes to the African community, Walker inextricably creates an alternative textual construct of the self and the Other through the gendered and racial heterogeneity of Carl Jung, known as Tashi's Swiss psychiatrist Mzee. The molar segments formerly seen non-negotiable are merged by Tashi's madness. The novel's dichotomous equation of race and gender is molecularized by the different perceptions of various characters. In a letter to Lisette, Adam assumes that Tashi sees Jung as "a kind of Santa Klaus," who is "another representative of the exotic Western and European culture she so adores" (*PSJ*, 66). However, Tashi herself regards Jung as an African grandmother with his "motherly squeeze" (*Ibid.*, 71) and his welcoming house:

I did not fear him partly because I did not fear his house. Though medieval European in its outer aspects, particularly its turrets and small slate courtyard, it had at its center a stone hut, round, with a large fireplace and flagstone hearth. He knelt there, his old knees creaking, to light the morning and evening fire, over which he cooked; and seemed to me, at times, an old African grandmother, metamorphosed somehow into a giant pinkfaced witchdoctor on this other, colder continent (*PSJ*, 50).

Adam's Santa Klaus assumption is challenged by Tashi's own interpretation of Jung. As the first psychiatrist Tashi can bond with, Jung is connected to a deeper reality than the European exterior, which breaks down the borders not only between Europe and Africa but also between femininity and masculinity. Ironically, throughout the novel, Tashi repeatedly has nightmares of a dark tower wherein she is held captive with her wings broken. Walker's preference to situate Tashi within Jung's tower at

Bollingen,¹⁷ which Jung himself defines as “a place of maturation—a maternal womb or a maternal figure in which I could become what I was, what I am and will be. It gave me a feeling as if I were being reborn in stone” (2013: 213), shifts the phallic implications of the nightmare from the oppressive patriarchal structures of Olinka to a healing process of heterogeneity where the maternal is nourished by and merged with its Other. The novel’s repetitive emphasis on Jung’s feminine characteristics evokes what Deleuze and Guattari call “a molecular women’s politics that slips into molar confrontations, and passes under or through them” (2005: 276). As Jung’s portrayal obscures the categories of race and gender, his textual construct in Tashi’s narrative functions as a molecular woman, a microfemininity, which, according to Deleuze and Guattari, lies at the beginning of all molecular becomings that challenge and pass through rigid societal segments (*Ibid.*, 277). Tashi’s portrayal of Jung as an African grandmother, in its molecularization of maleness and Africanness, becomes the lens through which a new Africanness and femininity are created. In this light, the fact that Tashi recovers her formerly suppressed memories of her sister Dora’s death or ‘murder’—actualized during Dora’s female genital cutting ritual—in the presence of Jung and in his tower indicates the freedom that comes with the breakdown of molar segments. This link between the awareness triggered by female madness and the breaking down of patriarchal structures exposes the thematic and structural interconnectedness of all the examined novels which locate the intertwined conceptions of deconstruction of abnormal normalcy and creative potential of madness at the center of their narratives.

To borrow Chesler’s title, woman’s inhumanity to woman, which is peripherally explored in the other novels, plays a crucial role in the cultural critique of Tashi’s madness. The “deadly and alive” line of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 200) reveals itself as a form of desire to annihilate in Tashi’s formation of the new African femininity, which critiques the solidarity of African womanhood.

¹⁷ In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Carl Jung narrates the construction of his house, which he calls ‘the Tower,’ a place of “repose and renewal” (Jung, 2013: 212). “A symbol of psychic wholeness” (*Ibid.*, 214), the Tower provides seclusion and rebirth of the self for Jung. Walker merges the story of her alienated African protagonist with Jung, another outsider, whom Tashi claims “had a look of madness to match my own” (*PSJ*, 48), blurring the clear-cut distinctions of race and gender imposed on by the larger social aggregates in exchange for psychic wholeness.

Whereas *Hibiscus* centers Beatrice's madness in the narrative through Eugene's death, *Possessing* challenges the patriarchal oppression and one-dimensional definitions of African femininity within the boundaries of female-to-female relations. Referring to the ritual of female genital cutting in Africa, Walker herself names the preface of the novel "the Mother's Business" (*PSJ*, 6). Even though the subjugation of African women is pointedly emphasized in the novel, the patriarchal force that limits women's sexuality and their self-expression remains a vague collectivity devoid of any individual recognition. Tashi's father is only mentioned once for having six wives; and there are no other Olinkan men involved with Tashi that are portrayed in their own right, leading Walker to receive criticism for excluding African men from her holistic womanism.¹⁸ *Possessing* specifically dwells on women's contribution to patriarchal forms of oppression. In *Yellow Sun*, Olanna's mother provides no guidance for her inner conflicts; Meridian is portrayed in constant clash with her mother, and *Hibiscus* does not present any maternal figure for Beatrice. In dialogue with these novels, Tashi's madness is closely intertwined with how she perceives maternal figures and her motherland. Similar to *Meridian*, Walker reiterates the destructive force of the idealization of women in *Possessing*. Tashi's psychiatrist tells her Negro women "can never be analyzed effectively because they can never bring themselves to blame their mothers" (*Ibid.*, 27). The inability to blame mothers is laden with the binary construction of femininity where mothers are either idealized or demonized. As Chesler repeatedly points out, women, like men, are human beings capable of both "compassion and cruelty" (2009: xxi). *Possessing* intertwines this idealization of mothers with Tashi's transition from object to subject; therefore, the narrative positions female agency against the female reinforcement to patriarchy through Tashi's murder of her circumciser, M'Lissa. Tashi's enactment of her regained memories and revenge on M'Lissa disrupts the discourse of solidarity among African women through motherhood and points at the hidden dynamism of patriarchy where women themselves play an active role.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Bekers, for example, criticizes the one-dimensional portrayal of African men in the novel, for it betrays Walker's womanist agenda, which indicates equal concern for black women and men (2010: 160-1). This argument becomes more conspicuous when the more complicated representations of male characters of African American and European origin are taken into consideration.

The ambivalent representation of violence and murder in *Hibiscus* is reiterated in *Possessing*. Despite the tendency of both madwomen to impose change on the external world, the ambiguous outcomes obscure their victory. Unlike Meridian who philosophizes the act of killing and prioritizes inner change, Walker's new protagonist does not hesitate to kill. In her article, "My Father's Country is the Poor," Walker, calling herself "a pacifist and a believer in the use of nonviolent means to effect social change," examines the necessity of violence in the Cuban Revolution because of "the evil of waiting interminably for conditions to change at someone else's convenience" (1983: 183). Similarly, Lisette, the enlightened French woman in *Possessing* claims: "Doomed, even, to a kind of insanity that I believe the pampered oppressed always feel, and for which there seems to be no remedy except enlightenment regarding their plight, followed by active exercise of the insights of their awareness" (*PSJ*, 100). Walker's construction of the Cuban Revolution and Lisette's emphasis on "active exercise" of awareness circuitously justify Tashi's act of violence. In a similar vein, critic Geneva Cobb Moore interprets Tashi's act of murder as the victory of "good" over "evil" (2017: 224). However, due to its multi-layered structure and focalization of various characters, including M'Lissa, the narrative follows a more Deleuzoguattarian structure where "good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary selection, which must be renewed" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 10). Just as Beatrice's murder of Eugene does not offer a clear-cut victory of the good over evil, Tashi's murder of the old woman, M'Lissa, is more multi-faceted than the well-deserved triumph of the heroine, which can be seen in Tashi's own subsequent death as opposed to the transformed and self-sufficient madwomen of *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*. Echoing *Hibiscus*, the novel brings into focus the segmented consciousness of the madwoman and the segmented solution of murder through the undefinability of Eugene and M'Lissa, both of whom occupy two conflicting positions of the oppressed and the oppressor.

The complexity of matrophobic violence and the repudiation of clear-cut categories of good and evil are directly related to Walker's multi-layered representation of Tashi's madness, which reveals the interconnectedness of lines shaping individuals and social aggregates. The target of Tashi's revenge, M'Lissa, is depicted both as a woman and a concept, namely, the Olinkan tradition and the

motherland, since M'Lissa is considered to be "a link with the past" (*PSJ*, 119), and "a national monument" (*Ibid.*, 115). The narrative contrasts Tashi's demonization of M'Lissa the concept with the subjugation of M'Lissa the woman. Tashi's act of murder switches the idealization of motherhood to its demonization, which still carries segmentation. Unlike Olanna and Meridian who, through their madness as a non-segmentary line of flight, are free of binarisms for the creation of their new subjectivity, Tashi's conceptualization of M'Lissa relies on a binary. This binarism results from her exposure to the migrant heterogeneity in which she cannot completely reside. Both the chapter she regains her memories of Dora's death and the chapter she goes back to her motherland to kill M'Lissa are named "Tashi-Evelyn," indicating how her perception of agency and femininity are influenced and shaped by her American self. The conflict between Tashi and her circumciser turns into a conflict between Africa and the United States. However, Walker complicates this binary by underlining the similarities between the two women. Echoing Tashi's giving birth at the hospital, where she becomes the object of everyone's gaze, M'Lissa turns into a cultural object of the postcolonial gaze:

A flag flew above her house, the red, yellow and blue vivid against the pale noonday periwinkle sky. I was not her only visitor; there were cars parked in the postage-stamp parking lot, neatly screened from the house by a rose-colored bougainvillea, and a tour bus was halted by the road. The passengers were not permitted to disembark, but were busy taking photographs of the cottage from the windows of the bus (*PSJ*, 117).

Rather than an individual, M'Lissa, too, turns into an image, albeit allegedly a more positive one. By focalizing M'Lissa, Walker contrasts this idol-like image with M'Lissa's own experience of betrayal as a child and her own bodily difference. Even though she is a circumciser, M'Lissa herself suffers from the patriarchal subjugation. Contrary to Moore's above-mentioned classification of M'Lissa as evil, the narrative exposes her liminality. Ironically, Tashi's slogan "If you lie to yourself about your own pain, you will be killed by those who will claim you enjoyed it" (*Ibid.*, 87), reactive toward the patriarchal claims about female genital cutting though it may be, also points at the complexity of M'Lissa's death. Tashi, claiming M'Lissa enjoys her role, is the one killing M'Lissa, which, interestingly, is expected and supported by

Olinkan traditions. Exploring Tashi's fragmented selves due to migration, critic Lillian Temu Osaki regards Tashi's act of murder as a weak point in the narrative since educating M'Lissa rather than killing her would have been a better option (2002: 17). Even though the educational option is healthier and more constructive, M'Lissa's death in the hands of Tashi, as an artistic choice, underscores the power dynamics between an American citizen and a postcolonial subject. More importantly, Tashi's preference to kill reflects the segmentary and destructive nature of her line of flight. Her segmented 'solution' to her multi-dimensional madness echoes Beatrice's ambiguous solution in *Hibiscus*. Both novels situate their madwomen within the solution of the murder of people who are themselves victims and victimizers. By concocting the definitions of good and evil, *Possessing* reinforces *Hibiscus*' distinction between internal and external transformation. Rather than presenting Tashi's murder of M'Lissa as a complete victory over evil, the narrative raises questions about the nature of self-actualization since Tashi's regained memories, leading her to be a murderess, point out the inevitable responsibility that comes with freedom and agency, both of which are a starting point, and not the completion of her recovery.

Alternating between the interiority foregrounded in *Yellow Sun* and *Meridian*, and the exteriority explored in *Hibiscus*, *Possessing* merges internal and external transformation, and diversifies the simplistic equations of interiority and exteriority. The novel portrays Tashi's inability to negotiate the inner and outer worlds through her tendency to make up stories as an alternative construct to the external reality. Similar to Beatrice's figurines, storytelling serves as a coping mechanism and a dual existence that constantly creates a binary within and without. In this respect, Elaine Scarry highlights the difference between pain and imagination in terms of objects or objectlessness, since pain is "a state remarkable for being wholly without objects" whereas in imagination, there is no "experienceable condition" or "felt-occurrence" without its object (1987: 162). Walker interlocks Tashi's constant imaginings¹⁹ and

¹⁹ Even at the court for her trial, Tashi keeps making up stories about people and situations. This escapism into an alternative world after M'Lissa's death indicates that her recovery from madness is not in direct proportion to agency. It is more intertwined with a rhizomatic consciousness as will be examined.

her refusal to be without objects with the segmented and arborescent structures of perception, where everything is dependent on everything else and people or concepts are constructed against one another. Echoing *Hibiscus*' portrayal of duality within the dichotomous construction of the figurines, *Possessing*, too, utilizes imagination to connect the larger divisions of racial and gendered identities as well as binarisms entailing continents and cultures. Tashi's subjectivity is constantly shaped by pain/the subject (the self) and imagination/the object (the Other). Even the death of Tashi's sister is dichotomized against her subjectivity: "How small I felt, especially since Dura was no longer around to measure myself against" (*PSJ*, 25). Likewise, her fragmented selves are conflicting aspects of these arborescent structures. As the Olinkan identity is restructured and redefined against the American identity, Tashi's culturally inscribed body is restructured and redefined against an imaginary cultural construct within a utopian portrayal of the United States.²⁰ It is no coincidence that Walker synchronizes the breakdown of the Olinka-America dichotomy and Tashi's preference of reality over imagination. By utilizing Tashi's storytelling as a device to reflect the insanity of dualistic segments, Walker underscores the consolidation of a non-binary, rhizomatic consciousness for recovery:

I can feel my mind trying to kick off into an alternative flag story to replace the one that happened, in fact, to the people. But surprisingly, nothing happens. My head, like the rest of my body, remains solid in my chair. My refusing-to-leap imagination never makes it even as far as the open windows of the room. I have the uncanny feeling that, just at the end of my life, I am beginning to reinhabit completely the body I long ago left (*PSJ*, 89).

The body and psyche are united since the pain, with its objectlessness, refutes an imaginary identity on which the suffering body/mind is dependent. Furthermore, the repudiation of binaries is strengthened by the ambivalent relation between agency and self-actualization. In the act of murder, Tashi exerts agency on the external world

²⁰ Scholarly works often point out the correlation between Tashi's recovery and her awareness of the dark tower dream with its misogynistic implications. However, little attention has been given to Tashi's epiphany regarding her host country. Sticking to its idealized, heavenly image till the very end, Tashi tells in her letter to Lisette before her execution, "But if heaven is like Olinka, or even like America, there is much to be anxious about" (*PSJ*, 199). It is only here that the novel is free from the binary constructions of Olinka and America. Tashi, breaking away from exclusive segments, is finally named "Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson."

without breaking down the arborescent binary of Olinka and America. In other words, similar to Beatrice, she tries to impose change without before changing within. The novel accentuates the importance of inner change by subverting the fixed relations between exteriority and interiority. Killing without internal change is replaced by dying with inner transformation. Therefore, the narrative depicts Tashi's death as a victory as she claims, "I am no more. And satisfied" (*Ibid.*, 203). Even though both *Hibiscus* and *Possessing* explore madness in relation to murder, Tashi's concomitant awareness asserts a more independent subjectivity. Unlike Beatrice, Tashi pays the price for her crime herself without taking shelter in another patriarchal form of power. In this light, Walker's narrative ends on a more promising note, albeit at the cost of Tashi's death. Yet, despite the celebratory manner presented in the novel, the narrative almost signals to *Meridian*'s recurring nightmare where she is a character in a novel with an "insoluble problem, one that would be solved only by her death at the end" (*MER*, 108). This intertextual reference between two madwomen underscores the 'insoluble' nature of the problem of the African female body within intercultural structures of representation and power as well as the intrinsic de-formations of identity against the highly divided external power dynamics.

In congruence with previously examined novels, *Possessing* postulates a multi-faceted representation of gendered madness based on the contentious discussion on the purportedly cultural ritual of female genital cutting in an international context. Questioning the nature of culture, national identity and femininity in a discourse of exclusion, the novel creates a thematic and structural parallelism with *Yellow Sun*, *Meridian* and *Hibiscus* in its utilization of gendered madness as the locus of dualistic paradigms that shape and hierarchize individuals and social aggregates. Situating Tashi's circumcised body at the center of the narrative, the novel foregrounds the close connection between the body and mind in the literary representation of female madness, upon which the discursive social crises of black femininity are founded. Tashi's body, with the molar and molecular lines inscribed on its otherness, becomes the vehicle through which the national and intercultural power structures are revealed and repudiated. In parallel with Deleuzoguattarian line of flight, Walker explores Tashi's otherness and its

implications of the cultural construct of the self and the Other. Tashi's exposure to the migrant experience, presenting the confrontation with the Other, creates an opportunity to break free from the molar segments of static cultural identity and to create a new, rhizomatic black subjectivity. In its violent solution to change misogynistic cultural rituals, the novel subverts Wilentz's healing narratives. It converges internal and external transformation in contradictory and complementary ways that blur the arborescent constructs of femininity, national identity and cultural dynamism, which brings forth the prioritization of non-segmentation in the textual relationality and connectivity of all the novels.



CONCLUSION

In her essay, “Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O’Connor,” Walker claims that the truth about any subject can only be obtained by converging all the different perspectives of a story, for each story is a missing part of another story, evoking a sense of completeness through a miscellaneous collection of voices (1983: 55). One of the main objectives of this study has been to question different perspectives of the madwoman paradigm and explore the intricacies of their intertextual exchange, which defies an antithetical approach to their comparison. Exploring the selected four novels with radical and liberal feminist nuances, the dissertation has examined the analogous experiences of black madwomen whose point of origin differs both in terms of the cultural and historical background in which they are created and in the representation of the African or African diasporic consciousness they convey. The novels, reflecting similar political and cultural tensions in their specific contexts, as well as divergent systems of feminized political protest, ramify the black madwoman paradigm, which, as mentioned in the Introduction of this study, is idealized as the superwoman who reacts to the sociopolitical contradictions of collective categorizations and recovers thanks to her emotional strength. By creating an intertextual dialogue between texts originating in Nigeria and the USA, the current study has attempted to foreground a heterogeneous literary space, where the black female madness, not idealized or demonized by homogeneous and exclusive discourses of racial and gendered exceptionalism, is connected to the dominant discourse of (white) mad writing and, therefore, transgresses the boundaries of nationality, language and history. Ironically, as explored throughout the chapters, the selected works have received criticism for their depiction of black femininity and African-based traditional structures, which can be exemplified by *Meridian*’s negative reception within the Black Arts Movement that promulgated the image of a solely positive black identity, or *Purple Hibiscus*’ labeling as un-African due to its feminist agenda. The study considers not only the mad characters as part of the discourse of exclusion but also the texts themselves that in their very existence repudiate socially constructed notions of Africanness and femaleness.

The dissertation has scrutinized the inextricable connection between the construction of madness, ideologies of gender and the possibility of transforming madness into a creative force of individual and communal transformation. All the madwomen within the scope of this study occupy a liminal space in their societies due to their individual differences, all of which, overtly or circuitously, defy the idealized notions of black femininity. These differences entail salient issues of motherhood, sexuality and gendered conceptualizations of political protest against the larger structures of power. In congruence with the deconstruction of the idealized black woman, the selected texts converge madness and the monolithic understanding of black motherhood, which necessitates the imposition of biological motherhood on the black women. It, in turn, positions the female subject in the liminal space of otherness. The portrayal of sexuality is also intertwined within the discourse of madness. Whereas *Yellow Sun* portrays Olanna as a sexually active yet barren woman, for example, *Meridian* situates the title character in a circle of fertility without an active exertion of sexuality. Likewise, Tashi and Beatrice, both mothers, reflect a sense of suppressed sexuality. By interlocking female madness, motherhood and sexuality, the selected works dissociate black female sexuality from motherhood and contextualize them within the discourse of difference through madness. It can then be argued that the utilization of gendered madness in black women's fiction redefines the female body and psyche in ways that at once merge them with one another and necessitate the rearrangement of their relevance. By examining black motherhood and sexuality from multiple viewpoints reflected in the distinct portrayals of the madwomen in question, the study has offered a more complex reconfiguration of the connection between women's psychological health and their socially circumscribed bodies.

Despite the congruous disassociations of motherhood and sexuality in the depiction of gendered madness, the novels diverge from one another in their exploration of the potential meanings of madness. As the current study has argued throughout the chapters, the objective of the analysis has been to shift the focus from the exploration of the madwoman's rebellion or submission to the applicability of madness as a strategy for internal and external transformation. In the entirety of the comparative analysis, the selected works manifest an analogous evaluation of

homogeneity and heterogeneity with regard to the conceptualization of black femininity and its relation to the female psyche. Applying the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the arborescent and rhizomatic systems of thought to the consciousness of the black madwomen, the study argues that the characters who are classified as mad follow either a homogeneous understanding of femininity or a fluid, heterogeneous perspective. These choices are further linked to the madwoman's potential to perpetuate external transformation through internal change. The destruction of this potentiality can be observed in *Hibiscus* where Beatrice, mad though she is, does not pluralize the societal impositions of gender roles. Rather, her madness becomes a tool for the perpetuation of dualistic paradigms and evokes further alienation both from the self and the community. This inability leads to the failure of the transformative power of madness. *Meridian*, on the other hand, not only goes beyond biological motherhood but also turns it into a political medium of resistance, feminizing the political sphere and politicizing the feminine. The homogeneity or heterogeneity of the black madwoman's consciousness, therefore, plays a key role in the creation of a madwoman paradigm that goes beyond mirroring the voice of the voiceless and turns into a tool for societal transformation.

Unlike the focus of white female mad writing on the patriarchal power structures, the selected works extend the politics of difference to the precarious relationship between the past and the present, both of which are shaped and navigated by the colonial encounter or slavery, depending on the point of origin of the text. The black madwoman functions as a locus of political tension and civilizational clashes. *Yellow Sun*, for example, situates Olanna within the male-dominated violence of the Biafran war, incorporating her highly feminized madness into a key point in Nigerian history in terms of the creation of a distinct Igbo identity. Likewise, *Meridian* explores a historical period—the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement—that is considered a crucial point for the construction of a unique African American identity. Both texts, through their thematic and structural parallelism, utilize the madwoman figure to foreground the forgotten or overlooked aspects of these important historical events. The madwoman, then, becomes a strategic tool to diversify the homogeneous conceptualizations of history and the processes of ethnic formation. Situated outside of normalcy, both madwomen turn

into cultural witnesses and carriers of memory for the silenced gendered and racial Other. As the narratives of extreme situations, both *Meridian* and *Yellow Sun* employ female madness to foster a more inclusive and heterogeneous narrative of war and political protest, the potentiality of madness is actualized through the acknowledgment of the silenced. It is no coincidence that the madwomen in question go beyond the monolithic definitions of their ethnic and racial identities, which leave room for a non-binary understanding of ethnicity and race. Their transformational function in the black communities whose one-dimensional values situate them in a liminal space results from the inner deconstruction of fixed dichotomies. This correlation between the madwoman's potentiality for the collective transformation and the importance of heterogeneity has also been substantiated by the other prototypes of madwomen explored in *Hibiscus* and *Possessing*. The latter works, dwelling also on the intercultural conflicts and the postcolonial nuances of unbelonging, employ madness as a strategy to reflect the in-betweenness of homogeneous cultural constructs. The healing, or the transformation, comes only with a harmonized and inclusive reconstitution of the past and the present. Therefore, the selected texts foreground heterogeneity in the creation of the transformational potential of madness.

The selected works further strengthen the connection between female madness and historical conflicts through the multivalent depiction of the 'solutions' both for the sociocultural conflicts of each text and the madness arising from them. All the selected works have experimental, fragmented, non-linear narrative structures and offer more than one narratorial voice to posit the intersubjective dimension of insanity. The lack of a clear-cut beginning in the narratives is utilized by both Adichie and Walker to reveal the need for a multi-dimensional system of solutions rather than one single solution. All the selected works tackle the issue of madness from multifarious viewpoints, interlocking various types of oppression and alienation. This multiplicity inherent in the discourse of exclusion and difference defies homogeneous motives for social transformation. The depictions of murder examined in *Hibiscus* and *Possessing* can be exemplified within this monolithic framework. Rather than addressing all forms of exclusion to their alienation, the act of murder carried by Beatrice and Tashi sheds light on the necessity of inner

transformation prior to external change. Unlike the fluid identities of Olanna and Meridian whose experience of madness evokes a new beginning for a dichotomy-free female and racial subjectivity, Beatrice and Tashi are stuck in the very systems that lead to their madness. Olanna's balanced stance toward Igbo and British aspects of her identity turns into Beatrice's internalization of a monolithic sense of Igboness and Catholicism. Correspondingly, Meridian's resistance against the restrictive racial ideologies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement is negated in *Possessing* by Tashi's misguided adherence to the ideological discourses of female genital cutting. Since both Beatrice and Tashi exert violence on the external world and do not reflect an inclusive understanding of their alienation, the creative potential of madness is negated.¹ The interlocking representations of different female resistances to similar oppressive systems underscore the difference between action and reaction. The multi-dimensional perception of the alienation of the black woman urges action, which leads to individual and communal growth whereas the helplessness of the madwoman, who is stuck between exclusive categories of ethnic/racial, religious and gender dimensions of identity, is further entrapped in the very systems from which she tries to escape. The comparison of these texts, then, hints at the necessity of an inner journey through which the madwoman can create connections where there were none before in order to foster a heterogeneous black female subjectivity.

Throughout the dissertation, the literary representation of female madness has been scrutinized within the specific focalization of African and African American female subjects. As all the works are based on the particular depiction of the black madwoman, the attention has been given to the peculiar sociopolitical elements revolving around the black female subject. However, the conceptualization of literary

¹ However, it is important to keep in mind that madness depicted in *Possessing* and *Hibiscus* are not identical. Whereas both revolve around murder, *Possessing* still gives room to the deconstruction of dichotomous segments in Tashi's psyche. Her death penalty, as opposed to the unpunished Beatrice also defies easy categorizations of submission and raises the question of agency and its role in the creative potential of madness. Furthermore, the comparative analysis of these particular texts creates a complementary depiction of Africa, as *Possessing* portrays the colonial encounter from the viewpoint of Tashi who is alienated due to the oppressive traditions of her tribe whereas Beatrice reacts against the domineering limitations of the imperial powers on her fragmented sense of self, which creates an intertextual space of madness narratives from different origins of the African diaspora.

madness in its entirety is beyond the scope and limits of this study. It could be a useful strategy to explore white women's madness in relation to the already analyzed works in an attempt to examine possible connections of heterogeneous female identity and political activism as well as black men's madness to illustrate the ways the discourse of exclusion plays out in different genders of the same racial origins. As the theoretical framework of the dissertation—the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the line of flight—addresses to the human condition in general with no specific focus on a particular gender or race, the line of flight, in its potential to explore madness, might be an efficient tool to create bridges among white gendered madness and black gendered madness, along with the core issues of homogeneity and heterogeneity reflected in these works with regard to both individual and communal crises of identity.

All in all, the dissertation has attempted to foreground an intertextual literary space for gendered madness through analogous but not identical representations of the black madwoman in the selected four texts by authors of different Africa-based origins. As the novels explore the dilemma of intercultural belonging, patriarchal impositions and internalized social constructs of homogeneity from various angles given their specific points of departure, the present study has aimed to reach a multi-directional image of the black madwoman, addressing both to the limitations of the monolithic conceptualizations of the self and society. The comparative analysis of the works of Adichie, a Nigeria-oriented author, and Walker, her American counterpart, has paved the way for a more complementary viewpoint regarding the link between madness, cultural imperialism and the prevalence of patriarchy within discrete contexts in black women's writing. Despite its limitations concerning the complexity of the subject, the dissertation has unveiled a heterogeneous discursive space in the portrayal of the black madwoman wherein the monolithic categorizations of femininity and blackness are eventuated into an intrinsic construction of meaning and identity through which a new sense of individual and communal awareness is constituted and foregrounded.

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