Reimagining Herstory: A Transnational Study of Women's Writings

by

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Abstract

My doctoral research offers a comparative study of the function of storytelling in a selection of fictional works by women writers from around the world including novels and short stories by the Persian writer, Simin Daneshvar (1912—2012), Canadian writer, Alice Munro (1930 –), and British writer, Iris Murdoch (1919—1999). I examine these texts to trace depictions of female characters who are marginalized by their communities' hegemonizing narratives and tend to challenge the dominant narratives of their textual communities. I argue that the women writers in this study, from their various locations around the world, create lifelike characters and communities in their fiction who can redefine their identities through their counter narratives challenging and/or changing their predefined social positions. As part of my comparative study, I have developed a reading strategy for examining these texts, their depictions of characters, and character interactions with their textual communities, in order to identify the ways in which these characters and their stories redefine their identities in the face of hegemonizing male-oriented social structures. In each chapter, I offer comparative case studies to highlight the ways these the female characters are positioned in these textual communities, and how they reimagine their identities through their acts of storytelling. Through the characters they create and the power of storytelling, therefore, these authors criticize and write back to their patriarchal social structures. The ways these authors use storytelling to reimagine *herstory* are comparable across different languages and cultures, as represented in their depictions of characters, communities and social institutions.

For my mom, Homa Hosseinian, who taught me how to stay positive, grow resilience and never give up on what I believe;

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Storytelling as the Shared Language of Women Writers around the World

Stories are cultural tools through which people make meaning; stories recount cultures and cultures in turn shape and reshape individuals. In Dan Yashinsky's words, "whatever your mother tongue, every human being speaks story as a second language" (95). Stories can make socially acceptable or challenging, identity-seeking pathways for us. Stories connect us as social beings to our individual and collective past and present. We make stories and they make and re-make who we are by problematizing, retelling, or confirming our social experiences. Everyday depictions in fiction, in specific, communicate social realities and alternative possibilities to readers as seen by the author. Lifelike portrayals of the everyday, therefore, enable the woman writer to create plausible settings, characters, and voices that reflect socio-historic conditions, which she may have experienced as the subject of her contemporary society as well.

For instance, Daneshvar and Munro tend to depict the communities in which they grew up and formed their identities in their fictional works. Even decades later, their semi-autobiographical and socially emblematic works of fiction such as *Savushun* and *Lives of Girls and Women* tell the readers then and now about the social narratives women had to challenge and change in order to reimagine their positions in their specific social contexts. In addition to the depiction of social communities from women's points of view in their fiction, these writers are able to highlight the female characters' acts of storytelling in making their alternative social positions in their textual communities.

Thus, people are in fact "situated[1]" within cultures by the tales and myths they are told and exposed to during their lifetime and they can alternatively affect their social structures through their storytelling. In this regard, Jean-Francois Lyotard observes that “a self does not amount to much, but no self is an island. [...] [E]ven before he is born, if only by the virtue of the name he is given, the human child is already positioned as the referent of a story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course” (*The Postmodern Condition* 15). From the very beginning of our existence, therefore, we are positioned within our social communities and in relationship to their functional stories even through the names we are given as parts of the language(s) we learn, and through which we live our lives.

In other words, we are all born into stories and our lives are constantly affected by storytelling as an act and a process: both by the stories communities tell in order to position different people variably within the communities’ social structures. The stories we tell ourselves and eventually others help us make sense of our everyday experiences in our communities. Storytelling is a language used by both communities and individuals and it can work toward strengthening a community’s “metanarratives”[2] that subjugate men and women, or it can help create a person’s “little narratives”[3] to challenge their community’s hegemonic social narratives.

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[1]Borrowed from Simone de Beauvoir’s “women’s situation.”

[2] “A metanarrative sets out the rules of narratives and language games […] the metanarrative organizes language games and determine the success or failure of each statement.” (Malpas 24)

[3]Narrative understood as a non-finite series of heterogeneous events of narration which resist incorporation into grand or meta-narratives by virtue of being discontinuous and fragmentary. As such, they are analogous to language games. (Readings xxxiii)

This study sets out to examine a selection of fictional writings by twentieth century women writers who depict the struggles of female characters in their textual communities. The case studies in my dissertation, despite being written over half a century and across four countries, illustrate comparable struggles of female characters resisting patriarchal heteronormative restrictions, albeit of different varieties given the specificities of the cultural contexts. The female characters these writers create use acts of storytelling in order to redefine their identities against the male-centered hegemonies of their communities. These acts not only enable them to reimagine their desired identities—which is often at odds with gender expectations and social roles predefined for them—but also challenge and at times subvert metanarratives and dominant social norms of their textual communities.

Storytelling in this study is defined as resisting acts and strategies of female characters that function as counter-narratives against the dominant social rules of their communities. I call these acts stories in that they have the power to challenge or at times subvert the hegemonizing narratives of these textual communities. For instance, the central character in Daneshvar's "A City like Paradise" uses storytelling in order to change her social situation, whereas in some other texts the character's willful acts and ways of being challenge their hegemonic communities. Such liberatory acts can be seen, for instance, in Munro's "Princess Ida" where the central character's unconventional lifestyle functions as a counter-narrative within her immediate community, challenging predefined narratives of femininity.

While this study does not examine theories of narratology, this thesis examines narratives as acts of resistance, where storytelling and narration plays a central role in social process and in individual self-understanding and thus in both subject formation and the

creation of homogenous communities. I begin from this position in order to focus on the texts produced by these writers to ask whether or not women writers' use of storytelling can be successfully studied comparatively. Borrowed from Lyotard's study of narratives, metanarratives in this study signify stories with legitimizing social functions: stories that gain their legitimacy through social and religious doctrines they represent such as religious or gendered institutions, whereas little narratives are the counter stories that characters make in order to stand their ground and have a voice of their own in a community that predefines their lives through its hegemonic narratives.

The writings of the three iconic women writers are comparatively analyzed in this thesis: *Savushun* and "A City like Paradise" by the Persian writer, Simin Daneshvar (1921–2012), *The Bell* by British philosopher and fiction writer Iris Murdoch (1919–1999), and "Friend of My Youth" and "Lives of Girls and Women" by the celebrated Canadian author, Alice Munro (1931–). Their writings share similar tendencies in the manner they create characters who survive their marginalized situations through storytelling. These authors represent their female characters in lifelike social contexts that expose their respective communities' homogenizing social narratives, and in so doing they are able to challenge and/or change these narratives and their own social positions.

Through lifelike depictions of female characters[4] in their social situations, the women writers in this study portray characters who are positioned in socially, ideologically, or

[4] This study uses "women" or "womanhoods" in its plural form to acknowledge different expressions of womanhood. The expressions, experiences and acts of female individuals who identify as and are perceived by others as the social category called "woman" (see Moi's *What Is A Woman?*). Within these texts' specific socio-cultural settings, the female characters are often entangled in their individual experiences and definitions of what

economically marginalized situations: these characters are often socially marginalized since they refuse predefined social roles and resist categorization according to their respective communities' gendered norms. These texts come from different geographic locations; therefore, they depict different socio-cultural structures and dynamics between fictional characters and their textual communities. These texts connect beyond borders through their depictions of female characters' similar struggles in dealing with social rules and homogenizing narratives that are imposed on them in patriarchal social institutions.

Despite their marginal positions and at times because of them—as will be seen through the case studies—these characters are able to challenge gendered norms and redefine their roles within their families and communities. In creating these marginal characters, Daneshvar, Murdoch and Munro, all create fictional worlds that challenge gendered norms and dominant narratives. Moreover, these writers create the possibility for the central characters to redefine their social positions within these textual communities grounded in the cultural realities specific to the places and spaces from which they are writing around the world.

In order to show the intricate relationships of the characters in their textual communities, this study proposes a transnational analysis of the social structures and dominant "language games" these women writers are responding to in the twentieth century from Iran, the U.K., and Canada, respectively. The dominant language games are represented in these texts in the form of male-oriented social narratives and institutions in which the female

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it means to be a woman and how their communities views womanhood in its monolithic heteronormative metanarrative forms, as a fixed predefined gendered institution.

character finds herself. Thus, these female characters make their counter-narratives out of the narratives they are exposed to in their communities.

It should also be noted, that the present study is not, however, to claim that the literary traditions and socio-cultural contexts in this research are identical, despite their differences. Instead, a main objective of this research is to show the similarities in the role of the female character in dealing with homogenizing patriarchal narratives of their textual communities. Moreover, this study will emphasize the role of women writers around the world in reflecting women's experiences and expressions around the world, despite the differences in the socio-political surroundings they represent in their works. In order to see how these differences and similarities connect these texts transnationally in the context of this study, a brief introduction of the women writers in this study and their texts will follow.

Transnational Stories Showing Features of Narratives of Community

My work offers a reading strategy that emerges from an adaptation of the notion of "narratives of community" introduced by Sandra A. Zagarell's "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre" (1989), which maps out shared characteristics of fictional works that are centered around a textual community. While in Chapter 2 I will speak to this concept in more detail, it is important to note that one shared characteristic of the case studies in my work is that they all involve the representation of a social community such as an abbey, a rural neighbourhood, or a family at the heart of the text. Moreover, there is at least one non-conformist female character who is pushed to the margins by the other members of the community who in turn challenges her social structure in order to redefine her identity by making up her stories. Thus, narratives of community are texts that are constructed around

central social structures, at times referred to as textual communities in this study, while the homogenizing effects of their communities are foregrounded in my adaptation of “narratives of community” as a genre.

As Zagarell introduces the concept, narrative of community “should be understood as a generative principle present in, and in some cases constituting the generic center of, a number of extended prose narratives” (502) which could take place in different times and places. In my study, these textual communities are represented in the form of institutions and social rules that characters feel obliged to follow. In these texts, social institutions define and maintain the practice of social frames in which they must either fit or else be labelled as outsiders of the community.

Zagarell identifies narrative of community as a genre which is present in some texts that “take as their subject the life of a community (life in “its *everyday* aspect”) and portray the minute and quite ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself as an entity” (499). These everyday processes which are “always saturated with meanings in which the personal and the communal unite” (517). I regard all texts in this research as "participating” (453) in this genre, with the specific focus of this study on the marginalized position of the female character in her community, her social interactions with other members, in their everyday practices, and under the influence of social institutions[5].

The use of the terms “social structure” or “community” in this research signifies the presence and influence of the institutions, dominant social rules and other characters

[5] All these texts are written in the form of what could be called Chekhovian realism in constructing their fiction in that they mostly “avoid depicting the hero’s state of mind; [they] try to make it clear from the hero’s actions” (May 197), as Chekhov stated as an important feature of realist fiction, in a letter to Alex P. Chekov.

surrounding the female character who monitor and reinforce her rule-following and condemn her non-conformist acts. I use this term in my work to indicate the specific social setting of a community where certain narratives dominate the position and relations of characters. Rule-following, therefore, is essential for individuals to be accepted as members of their communities. It is also important to note that I use the term "individual" in its political sense in my work to indicate the broader sociological significance of the characters' acts in these writers' fictional works.

Another shared characteristic of these communities is the prevalence of male-oriented social narratives. Calling these social structures patriarchal or male-oriented indicates that they are created and maintained from a male-oriented point of view. While different communities represented in this transnational study have various representations of patriarchy, the shared quality of these social structures—central to my work—is the dominance of rules and norms that are in place for female characters to follow, without paying attention to their own perspectives, experiences and expressions.

In order to show how these female characters in these narratives of community redefine their identities, I have included several case studies in different chapters: a Persian novel and a short story by Daneshvar, a British novel by Murdoch, and two stories by Alice Munro who mainly wrote their fiction in the twentieth century. Moreover, in order to show the applicability of my argument in other instances of women's writings of narratives of community, I will analyze two other works, "Out of Season," a Norwegian short story by Bjørg Vik (1935—2018) and *Things We Left Unsaid* by the Persian writer Zoya Pirzad (1952—) belonging to late twentieth century, in order to emphasize the timeless features of narratives of

community. Thus, the writers do not speak their feminist ideals through their characters: instead, they show their characters in action, either trying to subvert metanarratives of femininity in their patriarchal communities or rising above them and creating social changes, however small or temporary in the social structures of their communities.

What follows is a short survey of the writers and their works in this study: This survey will demonstrate how these texts are situated in their specific historical and literary traditions, and how they connect to one another beyond borders. I will start by giving a short historical background of the society Simin Daneshvar was writing from, since the literary tradition and cultural aspects of the modern Iran have not entered the world literature discussions at large. In addition, I will offer short introductions of the works of Iris Murdoch and Alice Munro.

Women's Position in Iran's Society and Literature Post 1940s

The social context of the 1940s onwards in Iran was an influential factor for improvements in women's social situation: in 1935 Reza Shah, after Ataturk (the Turkish leader's modernization project) made the historic yet discriminatory law that women could not appear in public with a veil, and any woman who disobeyed this law would face severe punishment. While this caused many women to face a serious barrier in terms of social involvement due to their religious beliefs and the traditional practice of hijab, it opened up opportunities for those who did not believe strongly in the importance of wearing a veil to become more engaged in social affairs. In this regard, Farzaneh Milani, a Persian literary scholar, in *Words Not Swords* also suggests:

> Women's progressively more unfettered and uninhibited liberty to step out from behind any real or figurative "private" space was a vital catalyst in Iranian modernity in

> general and in Iranian literary modernity in particular. It brought women from behind walls and veils into open and public spaces. […] It desegregated a predominantly masculine literary tradition by including women as producers, consumers, and objects of representation on an unprecedented scale[6]. (6)

While Reza Shah's law changed the social fabric of the previously traditional Iranian society in giving more social spaces to women, it created a social gap between the majority of women who adhered to the traditional and religious gender norms and restricted them from having any outside functions. Nevertheless, the forced modernization brought about a social structure where women could educate themselves and appear in more public roles equal to men. Having been more integrated and being more involved with social issues, women gained more agency to be active members of the society and negotiate their own social position Later, the more liberal policies of Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941–1979)—through giving the choice to women to whether or not have a veil in public—provided women with more freedom to speak out, become more educated, and take up more pivotal roles in the society.

Moreover, new forms of fiction gave women writers the space to reflect on the often-marginalized social positions of women. In line with modernist literary movements, the new

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[6]Despite the advances, the elements of patriarchy were still visible in society. Although tradition and modernity have taken rather contradictory definitions over time and under different ideological and political systems, religion has always acted as an important backdrop for both the limitations and the liberations granted to women in Iran. While male-oriented interpretations of religion have often created limitations for women throughout history, women writers and thinkers, who also had their roots in these traditions, contributed greatly to make their fellow female subjects speak throughout their stories via their artistic counter- narratives that made textual spaces for women to express themselves, not radically against religious doctrines, but within the same traditional structures.

forms of fiction influenced many Persian writers of the time and added a new dimension to Iran's literary past in creating a tendency to focus on depicting people's lives in familiar situations to which the readers could connect immediately; as Mahmoud Fotuhi Rumajani and Hashem Sadeghi Suggest,

> In the [early 20th century] […] the Iranian bourgeoisie is in the process of becoming a social class and gradually new classes [consisting] of social servants and employees with the appearance of a new lifestyle [appear]. Most novels of this period revolve around the description of these social groups' lives. The time of the story is close to reality and the setting is often the country's metropolitan cities while the subject matter is the confrontation of modernity and tradition[7]. (10)

In line with the changes in the social structures in Iran's move to more social liberties for women to express themselves, the identity crisis of women within community is often the central problem in novels and short stories of Daneshvar who was writing since mid-century, in Tehran, Iran under Mohammad Reza Shah's reign and later in the Post-Revolution Iran. The protagonists are mostly female characters who are pushed to the margins by community and are often able to 'story' their ways out of their predefined social conditions. For instance, in some stories, the protagonist is deprived of a point of view or she is viewed through others' points of view such as in Daneshvar's "A City Like Paradise" in order to foreground the female protagonist's social marginalization in her community. Depiction of a character's everyday life and social experiences, and in specific, those of a female character, had not been a main part of

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[7] My translation

Persian literary tradition, while by contrast, Daneshvar's stories show female characters from all walks of life, which is her significant contribution to the Persian literary tradition as an Iranian woman writer. In this regard, Milani argues:

> Daneshvar creates remarkable female characters who are neither idealized nor caricatured. In effect, she demands the verbal space denied to women in prose and, through her vital female characters, attracts attention to that which has habitually been relegated to the periphery. Her work offers insight into the lives of less ideologically and sexually stereotyped female characters. Her portrayal of women's experience as yet another way of exploring society establishes her as a significant pioneer, refreshingly absorbing in the detail and range of her field of vision. (328)

By portraying "less ideologically and sexually stereotyped" characters, Daneshvar tries to show the real everyday experiences of women in the male-oriented social communities in Iran as a reflection and a critique to her contemporary society. Her attempt to portray urban social communities of the time she was growing up in Shiraz and continuing her education in Tehran is particularly significant: in her fiction, she presents a woman's account of her contemporary Iran as it was going through significant socio-political changes in early to mid-twentieth century affecting women's identity formation even more so than their male counterparts. Thus, by representing the social changes through the eyes of her female characters, she creates alternative textual spaces where these marginalized characters could be seen and heard.

In many instances from her collections of short stories, *A City Like Paradise* (1961)—in particular a story by the same title that will be analyzed in Chapter 3—and her critically-acclaimed novel *Savushun*[8] (1969), Dansehvar foregrounds the sufferings of women in their marginalized social situations which are caused by different intersectional factors, such as their underprivileged socio-economic status, their religious beliefs being incompatible with the dominant norms and their non-conformist gendered expressions. These texts also show ways in which these characters are, nonetheless, able to challenge the social narratives that marginalize them, where they can create their own narratives, whether in the form of making new identities for themselves or creating alternative worlds through their acts of storytelling.

Female Characters' Positions in Iris Murdoch's Fiction

Depiction of social structures and the relations of characters and their communities are at the center of many novels by Iris Murdoch. Murdoch reacts to her contemporary French Existentialism and English linguistic philosophy in that she believes "they both separate the moral agent from all that surrounds him" (Conradi 22), emphasizing the function of the character's agency in her interactions with the community. Consequently, the lifelike portrayals of female characters and the matter-of-fact textual style of Murdoch's fiction make her novels great examples of narratives of community. Her fiction foregrounds other characters' presence and their influence on the protagonists' acts and characterisation which is often at odds with the dominant social norms.

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[8]Also translated into English *as A Persian Requiem.*

Murdoch portrays many marginalized characters, including characters in search of their identities in patriarchal societies. Her fiction often features central characters who cannot fit in or are not willing to follow the rules and narratives of their social communities. Rollyson connects Murdoch's art in her belief in that an "obligation for the novelist is the creation of the particularized, unique and ultimately indefinable human beings, characters who move outside the novelist's consciousness into an independent ontological existence" (2313). Her depiction of "indefinable human beings" further makes her writings relevant to this research: female characters who resist any institutional definition or labeling, in search of their identities, inhabit many of her novels.

In many of Murdoch's novels, female characters who have been driven to the margins through challenging the social rules struggle to define their gender roles in their communities. Peter J. Conradi also sums up Murdoch's unique characterization in that "the *bizarrerie* offered by her plots [that] comes from our sense that […] people are secretly much odder, less rational, more often powered by obsession and passion than they outwardly pretend or know, and that the novelist is revealing such secrets in creating her (imaginary) people" (6). Such "imaginary people" are the ones who push their limits into reimagining their desired identities particularly in her novel, *The Bell* (1958) which will be analyzed in this study.

Alice Munro's Stories as Narratives of Community

The urge to reimagine female characters' identities in marginalizing communities, and the concern to represent women's struggles to have a voice in their communities is also noticeable in many instances of contemporary women's writings in the twentieth century Canadian literature. As one of the best representative of this feature, Alice Munro's fiction

often foregrounds the questions of the construction of female identity. In her depictions of the Canadian rural communities in early to mid-twentieth century, she emphasizes the ways in which female identity is shaped by the community and the ways through which the female character is able to reimagine her desired identity.

Munro's subject matters not only often relate to women's issues, but they are also preoccupied with the role of communities in shaping characters' identities. In an interview Munro states that "[i]n small towns [...] you have no privacy at all. You have a role, a character, but one that other people have made up for you. Other people have already made yourself" (4). Thus, the role of "other people" is bolded in her fiction since many of these stories take place in a smaller community, small town or village. Munro believes that "other people," as part of a community, are responsible for turning an individual into "a character." This "role" that the character is given, however, is at times different from the self that she desires to obtain in order to define her identity. Such representations of the female characters in relation to other characters in the community could be detected in many stories in her two collections *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and *Friend of My Youth* (1990), in which central female characters are constantly trying to reimagine their own identities in relation and at times in contrast to other characters.

Thus, the existence of a homogenizing community is central to these texts, in that the female character is often confronted with dominant narratives in her social structure where to be accepted is to follow the rules and to conform to gendered social narratives. Moreover, the presence of others around the female protagonist represents social interactions where through words and acts of others, the central character is monitored, criticized, punished or rewarded

as a consequence of her following or rejecting the dominant narratives. In other words, the community is present in each case study as a group of characters in the text who are maintaining the homogenizing narratives in different forms. It is through these confrontations of these protagonists and other characters that these writers foreground the patterns of resistance and acts of storytelling.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter will introduce the theoretical framework of this dissertation. It will highlight the points of connection between transnational feminist scholarship and narratives of community, in providing a space for conversations between different instances of women's writings across cultures. It will introduce the feminist and transnational theoretical foundations of this research, as well as the ways in which these approaches could inform this study of the reimagination of self and community through storytelling and realistic representations. It will also foreground the social and spatial levels on which the selected texts meet one another beyond borders.

The second chapter will examine different structures and dynamics of communities and female characters as depicted in Munro's "Lives of Girls and Women*,"* Daneshvar's *Savushun*, and Murdoch's *The Bell*, as examples of narratives of community. This chapter will further compare and contrast these textual communities' hegemonic narratives—in the form of mainly social and religious institutions, which confine and predetermine roles and identities of female characters in similar ways. It will also explore the ways in which female characters, in turn, are able to affect the communities, by challenging and resisting these narratives through storytelling. The interrelated functions of community and characters as textual constructs

determine the credibility and survival of the female character's counter-narratives, which are mainly representations of the women writers' experiences and aspirations of and for their contemporary societies.

The third chapter will highlight forms and processes of storytelling as depicted in Daneshvar's "A City Like Paradise," and Munro's "Friend of My Youth." This chapter will compare and contrast the two stories' central female characters who are merely telling or retelling stories and challenging dominant narratives which go further than that and in fact create their own alternative realities by weaving their personal stories. In other words, this chapter will be an exploration of the way social spaces and experiences are translated into and represented in women's writings through the deployment of different narrative voices and levels.

The fourth chapter examines two other texts based on their depiction of the construction of female characters' subjectivity. I refer to these texts as allies since I have added these case studies to show my reading strategy's applicability to other forms of narratives of community from a yet more diverse historical timeframes and locations. The allies that I have included in this chapter are the contemporary Persian writer Zoya Pirzad's *Things We Left Unsaid* and Norwegian writer Bjørg Vik's "Out of Season." These texts, as other instances of narratives of community, will be examined to show how they can connect to one another, through a transnational feminist lens. Through the analyses of these texts, this chapter will also explore questions such as how this reading strategy can offer new perspectives to approach narratives of community by women writers not simply as examples of their specific literary and

cultural traditions, but also as representations of shared patterns of struggle and triumph in the everyday lives of women.

Through a transnational study of women's writings, this study will highlight the processes of storytelling used by characters in their communities as a way to reimagine their identities. Therefore, different aspects of this study will shed light on the critical functions of storytelling within the texts and beyond. Another question that this research seeks to answer is how narratives of community foreground processes of identity formation of female characters and highlight their acts and processes of storytelling in order to challenge and/or change their social positions. Another central issue to be examined in my work is how representation in women's writings relates to storytelling on the level of the female characters and ultimately the woman writer. Through exploring and juxtaposing all these different instances of women's writings around the world, I will illustrate how my reading strategy has the potential to connect women writers' experiences transnationally and highlight their shared goal of reimagining women's social positions and rewriting herstories.

Chapter 1: Transnational Feminisms Connecting Writers beyond Borders

As a mode of political thought that seeks change in women's social positions, feminist scholarship can open up new intellectual spaces in the exploration of fiction by women writers. In this comparative analysis, in particular, studying the acts and processes of storytelling in the social spaces reflected in the authors' creation of textual communities and characters can bring together texts with shared feminist outlooks. These texts offer examples of textual spaces through which female characters show their agency. These spaces of agency have been often left unnoticed in socio-political contexts of their contemporary communities in which these writers live. The conflicts between individuals and communities as represented through characters in their textual communities foreground the prevalence of social narratives in these communities.

Studying such textual sites for feminist aspirations allows for insights into women's ability to challenge and/or affect their social positions. Uncovering these stories as acts of resistance has paved the way for the acknowledgment of women writers' attempts at depicting women's shared struggles, beyond borders. Hence, this comparative study's focus on storytelling, as a liberating act and process, brings together such instances in women's writing with feminist literary criticism. As Lisa Disch observes, "feminists' most far-reaching challenge to the field may have begun, not by remedying women's putative absence from the historical record, but by contesting the very […] notion that history is primarily a field of stories about men and written by men" (787), which makes it a priority for feminist scholars to uncover and produce alternative "herstories," in turn. The sites of this "herstory" may not be limited to public spaces characteristic of history, but instead to different instances of women's writings.

Intersectional feminist outlooks in recent years have allowed for more inclusive studies of women's socio-economic situations around the world. Such inclusive studies have recognized differences in women's experiences by taking into account multiple fronts of discrimination that women of color face, while emphasizing the necessity to broaden the scopes of feminist studies to be applicable to all women. In Kimberle Crenshaw's words, "when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling" (1242). Thus, excluding women of color or their various experiences of patriarchy based on where they come from often has a deteriorating effect on social discriminations they face. Crenshaw adds that such exclusions from feminist scholarships lead to the reproduction of women of color's "subordination":

> The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women. These mutual elisions present a particularly difficult political dilemma for women of color. (1252)

Thus, a transnational feminist perspective can equip us with the necessary framework to juxtapose different forms of representation of women around the world. Such a perspective can enable feminist scholars to speak to various experiences of race, ethnicity, social class, and other issues that women of color deal with in addition to the discriminations they face as women in male-oriented social structures. Hence, redefining women's identity and offering alternative definitions and outlooks for feminism have been significant objectives of what has become known as transnational feminism in the recent decades.

Transnational feminism has been an attempt by non-Western feminist scholars, such as Gayatri Spivak, Uma Narayan, Gloria Anzaldua, and Chandra Mohanty, to name a few, to bring together women's various experiences and struggles around the world. Chandra Mohanty believes that in a world where the majority of women live in developing countries and are subject to everyday socio-political challenges, feminist studies cannot afford to treat non-Western, non-canonical definitions of feminism and representations of women as merely different and thus ignore them in mainstream feminist studies (See *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity)*. A presupposition of this kind would inevitably be at the cost of widening the gap between current Western and non-Western forms of feminism and

denying any possibility of communication between the different experiences and expressions of women around the world in today's feminist scholarship.

In addition to the lack of communication between these Western and non-Western feminist theories, this opposition causes even more problems for non-Western feminist scholars—most of whom are already denied recognition by their specific national hegemonizing value systems—in their attempts to "write the history of 'the contemporary Egyptian or Iranian or Turkish' context" (Abu-Lughod 16). Not having a voice or a place in "a Euro-American context where the presumption is that only Western women could really be feminists" (16) costs non-Western writers more isolation and marginalization. Moreover, a Western monolithic definition of feminism leads to more emphasis and space for white feminism void of intersectional concerns. The way to battle this dichotomy is "to refuse [...] to be dragged into the binary opposition between East and West" (16) and find the middle ground where connections rather than separations can be highlighted.

As a comparatist who has read and worked on both Western and non-Western writings by women in different academic settings in three continents, I have witnessed the ways in which women writers writing from non-Western contexts can be isolated from world literary studies. Moreover, collaborative efforts of transnational feminist around the world has indicated that literary and social theories can gain from interaction with one another. Having its roots in different cultural and literary traditions, therefore, this research will engage in cross-cultural conversations focusing on the texts' shared representations and processes of storytelling in the female characters' attempts to reimagine themselves. Reading various representations of women, in Anzaldúa's words, can "[shape] our everyday difficulties

> […] that also can be shaped by our own creative reckoning with conflict and our narration of new 'images' and symbols that connect us to teach others and to the planet" (81). This shaping and reshaping of our understanding of women's specific situations help highlight women's shared yet specific struggles and attempts to redefine their identities in their various social structures.

Thus, a transnational study can reveal how much the overall experiences and oppressive situations that women face are the results of specific cultures where they come from and various yet similar patriarchal structures worldwide. An objective of this study will be the analyses of the seemingly similar textual representations, beyond borders, which require more transnational, rather than local or national literary analysis. Thus, a transnational feminist outlook would generate conversation between texts based on their specific representations of women as they appear in opposition to stereotypical categorization of texts based on the geographical locations in which they are set or published.

Since the texts in this study depict the lives of the female characters in different social structures, many scholars might hesitate to approach them from the same perspective. While it is true that these socio-cultural structures are different, they all manifest shared qualities of patriarchy in that female characters experience life in a man's world. What is shared in many of these texts is that the female character is faced with a community that is structured in a male-oriented fashion, where she finds it difficult to see her own potential as an individual and positions herself as a character who needs to challenge social structures.

Therefore, this comparative study is an attempt to highlight the specific ways these texts depict social issues facing women in their communities, since "feminisms are never

autonomous but bound to the signifying networks of the contexts which produce them" (Kandiyoti 9). In this regard, Alison Jaggar also emphasizes the significant role of feminist scholars in changing perspectives of their contemporary audience, claiming “in an era of increasing integration, [where] the local and the global are inseparable, though […] not reducible to each other […]. Feminist researchers must find ways of exploring each in the context of the other” (197), in order to create possibilities for more conversations among various forms of feminism. Thus, in reading these texts side by side, this study will emphasize their private articulations of womanhood as well as shared experiences of women in different, yet comparable manifestations of patriarchy in their social structures.

In addition, it is important to note the role of setting and language in the cross-cultural readings of the texts for different audiences. While the reading experience of the readers differ based on the different times and locations that they are set in, literary translations of texts could at times add another level of complexity to the equation. However, comparative literary analysis can play a supplementary act of literary translation: through a transnational lens, the texts’ shared qualities can be highlighted in spite of their cultural, temporal, or linguistic differences and can converse with one another.

Comparative studies of this kind, which aim to look at women's writings in conversation have been largely absent from feminist studies in the previous decades—"mainly for fear of homogenizing literatures, or a “danger of speaking for others” (Alcoff) and neglecting their specific place in national literary contexts. Hence, as Kandiyoti observes, “there are surprisingly few attempts to systematically analyse points of intersection, dialogue and confrontation between discourses emanating from distinct socio-historical locations, especially

when these are situated outside the West" (1). This way, the different cultures lose the possibility to engage in conversations with one another. Moreover, a Western/non-Western dichotomy could inevitably lead to oversimplifying the social structures of Western societies on one hand and an underestimation of the plurality of non-Western ones, on the other:

> Identifying an 'external' site for the production of difference in Middle Eastern societies, namely the West and its internal allies, in contradiction to the 'truly indigenous', conveniently by-passes the need to take on board the equally heterogeneous, ethically and religiously diverse nature of such societies and potentially delegitimizes the voices of those politically defined as marginal. (Kandiyoti 17)

It is true that cultural nuances and complex social structures could be neglected, and oversimplification of non-Western cultures can happen quite easily by Western scholars; however, it is crucial for both Western and non-Western feminist scholars to engage in ongoing conversations with one another to continue defining and redefining forms of womanhood in many different social structures around the world. Through these conversations, feminist scholars will gain the ability to learn more about these nuances and engage in more inclusive theorization regarding different representations and forms of womanhood in women's writings. For instance, my experience as an Iranian woman scholar working with cross-cultural literary analyses of Western and non-Western literary texts in Canada give a more inclusive perspective of the connections between the two worlds.

In addition, women's specific and various expressions of womanhood and their similar struggles in confrontations with their communities' patriarchal institutions connect these texts beyond borders. A feminist reading of these texts can highlight the significance of these

"distinctively gendered experiences" and offer another meeting point for Western and non-Western representations of women. Women's expressions then, mainly in different forms of storytelling become a political means for these female characters to gain the social space and reimagine new possibilities for themselves, their immediate communities and women's situations around the world: "No longer wishing to be excluded or no longer content with the function which has always been demanded of us," as Julia Kristeva argues, women become willing to find an answer to the question "how can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition, and then as we want to transform it?" (467), a question which is at the heart of this study.

Revisiting Simone de Beauvoir's idea of women's social situations can be a starting point in attempts to reread her theories in the light of transnational feminism. For instance, Toril Moi discusses the manner in which Beauvoir believed that "a woman is always becoming, always in the process of making herself what she is […] women exist" (Moi 75–76). The "lived experience" of women that feminist thinkers such as Beauvoir and Moi emphasize is directly associated with the idea that there can be no one definition of womanhood. While the forms and processes might be different, women writers in this study show that it is through their storied lives that women get to retell their sufferings, as well as those of the past generations, in that "it is possible to read other-wise, in ways that acknowledge female-created violations of convention or tradition as deliberate experiments rather than inadvertent shortcomings" (Hite 3).

The case studies in this research show that women are able to reimagine their identities once they can express their varied yet liberating lived experiences of being a woman the way *they* experience them. Therefore, these reimaginations of the female self become possible

through different forms of textual constructions of their identities, which emphasize that being a woman is not a "thing nor an inner-emotional world," (Moi 81) but that their alternative experience of subjectivity makes an indeterminate space for women to reimagine their social position in their "way[s] of living in the world" (81). These "ways," therefore, are to be found or fashioned by women who "have to tell the stories themselves because then they shape the way it represents them, and thus can use the story as a way to inspire many ways of being a woman" (Kavanagh 9). Therefore, the ways and experiences of "being a woman" and the ways women's sense of self is shaped and reshaped need to be revisited through different definitions and theoretical investigations of contemporary feminist scholars. In other words, it is important for women—defined as "the person in question [who] has been taken to be a woman by someone else" (Moi 266)— to share their ways of challenging the established narratives of their communities and enhance their reimaginations of women's social position in these stories. The following brief survey of subjectivity theories in feminist studies, therefore, will assist in determining how female individuals define their genders and are defined by others as belonging to a specific gender and are categorized as women.

1.1. Representation and Transnational Feminisms

As the first issue to be addressed in this study, the present chapter will show how various representations of women in select fictional writings can help find shared grounds among Western and non-Western women writers and feminist scholars. A survey of contemporary theories on the notion of subjectivity will show how the texts in this research connect based on their representation of female characters. It appears overly restrictive to deny the female subject the possibility to either deviate from or change the established rules

of a community. Bing situated in a homogenizing community, I will demonstrate how this position is supported by Standpoint feminist theorists of subjectivity who emphasize the significance of the female subject's surrounding social structures in her identity formation. Anna Marie Smith, in her study of "Subjectivity and Subjectivation" suggests that "subjectivity theory tackles the problem of conceptualizing the relationship between agency and social structures without falling into the trap of a strict determinism in which resistance has always already been anticipated and wholly contained in advance" (970). Subjectivity, therefore, as a historical process, is an important issue in feminist studies, for it allows scholars to trace new ways for the female subject to challenge social norms of her community and be able to reimagine a new social order:

> [Feminist theory] underlines the fact that becoming a subject is a historical process that is tightly mediated by the established social structures (for example, heterosexism; racism, and ethnic chauvinism; patriarchal domination; […]) that make up a given society but that that process is animated by the agent's always protean and unruly desire for recognition. (A. M. Smith 955)

While the female characters in the following case studies come from different geographical points, their social structures and their positions within them are very similar. Social institutions are responsible to some extent in the formation of who the female subject becomes, or is becoming, and her "entire process of becoming a subject who is endowed with given set of interests [sic], preferences, and choice matrices" (Disch 956). Feminist approaches that acknowledge the influence of these institutions, yet recognize the female individual's will to become herself "question what it means to say that a structure

merely 'represents,' 'empowers,' or 'disempowers' the subject" (A. M. Smith 956). Thus, standpoint feminist scholars do not deny the female individual's agency to resist or subvert the norms of femininity advocated by these institutions and consider the space for the freedom of the subject to make choices in their theories.

While the standpoint feminist school of thought generally agrees on the notion that "the subject's desire always contains a degree of resilient alterity" (A. M. Smith 957), and they dedicate some space to discuss "moments of structural weaknesses and moments in which domination remains incomplete" (957), the degree to which they believe the subject is capable of resisting these hegemonizing narratives is different. Moreover, the "historical process" here emphasizes the role and function of the female subject in reshaping it. The historical process in the form of patriarchal social structures and ideology, which have long left women out of their analytical equations, have repeated themselves in different intellectual realms.

The agency of the female subject in making her social space is also echoed in Julia Kristeva's work, having its roots in a Psychoanalytical Marxist Feminist school of thought:

> [I]n theory, and as put into practice in Eastern Europe, socialist ideology, based on a conception of the human being as determined by its place in *production* and *the relations of production,* did not take into consideration this same human being according to its place in *reproduction,* on the one hand, or in the *symbolic order,* on the other. (196)

As a result, exclusion of women from the theoretical discussions of socialist ideology, based on the social and reproductive functions they had in these societies, resulted in not

counting women's roles in society other than what added to the material production, which eventually led the question of gender to become irrelevant in broader sociological discussions. Therefore, the female individual's ability to make up stories using similar linguistic structures and accepted language games of the community is what enables her to reimagine her identity. Smith's emphasis on the individual's ability to manipulate "subjectivation[9]" is in line with Judith Butler's idea that the main problem with masculine supremacy and normalization is that it has led to the "misrepresentation" of the feminine; the significance of the ideological discourse, in which the individual is set, is hence emphasized by Butler in order to indicate that for a social structure or institution to change, the social practices need to change (See *Gender Trouble*).

This is where the role of the female characters in creating her alternative reality in her community becomes critical: "Subject formation is a radically contingent process, even in conditions of extreme asymmetrical social structures. The gendered subject emerges, consciously and unconsciously, within and as the product of, a complex force field made up by discourses of domination and resistance" (Smith 970). Therefore, the prevalence of social power relations in the way female individuals are able to define their identities is central to feminist theorists of subjectivity, in specific.

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[9] The idea of women's ability to write their gender through language has been well discussed in writings of Cixous and Kristeva, namely in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) and *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984). While Cixous believes that it is through disregarding and breaking the rules that the woman writer is able to have her voice heard, Kristeva suggests that this process takes place through the *semiotic* layer of expression which often happens in poetic structures that individual's subjectivity can be traced.

In a similar vein, Sara Ahmed emphasizes the formation of female individual identity through sociopolitical power relations, in that "those who have the power to define or authorize the criteria for what or who is 'woman'" ultimately affect the definitions in a social context (112). Yet, who is authorized and the process in which this "authorization" comes about remain debatable issues among feminist scholars such as Butler and Kristeva, as discussed previously. These authorizers, according to Kristeva, are women who are able to translate these culturally salient experiences in their writings and bridge the gaps between women's representations beyond geographical and linguistic contexts:

> [New generation] women [writers] seek to give a language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past. Either as artists or writers, they have undertaken a veritable exploration of the *dynamic of signs*, an exploration which relates this tendency, at least at the level of its aspirations, to all major projects of aesthetic and religious upheaval […] such a feminism rejoins, on the one hand, the archaic (mythical) memory, and on the other, the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements. (463-64)

Kristeva, thus, emphasizes the centrality and authority of women thinkers—writers and artists—in depicting women's social experiences, and their ability to go beyond signifying within their national borders and escape marginalization in world literature. The texts in this study serve as examples of various representations of women in women's writings, in their attempts to use "language [as a] a resource […by which] women learn to 'translate' when they talk about their experiences, using words that are 'close enough' or saying part of what is experienced, groping for words, doing the best [they] can" (DeVault 102). As will be discussed further in

Chapter 3, language serves as a means for women writers to express their individual and social lived experiences. Women's writings of their gendered experiences, therefore, present the possibility of connecting these different experiences and social situations of women together in a transnational study.

The texts in this study have central female characters who one way or another are faced with their community's male-centered definitions of womanhood, what a woman should look and act like, and the dominance of patriarchal narratives in their lives; however, what these characters have in common is their tendency to challenge those narratives and definitions in search of their own desired identities. Furthermore, in their confrontations with others' perceptions of their identities and their socially constructed expectations, these characters are driven to see the other in their own alienated selves and are challenged to face the internal other and change their own stories. It is, in effect, upon rising above their own perceptions of themselves that they are able to reimagine a social space where they might be able to affect others' expectations and their communities' constraining narratives as well.

This transnational feminist study brings together the shared expressions of women writers in their specific societies, through examining female characters' identity formation in the textual communities they create. As will be seen in the case studies, these texts' structures, after Zagarell's idea of narratives of community, mimics social structures in that they depict communities with specific dominant social institutions and portray the experiences of female characters who face discriminatory social norms. Thus, these texts foreground the female character's position in her ongoing struggles with social institutions and other characters, where the spaces of conflict in the community are highlighted.

One important question that this research raises is how much the overall experiences and oppressive situations of women would differ if the geographical positions were changed. Feminist scholars such as Mohanty believe that we need to recognize the specific cultural backgrounds when looking at texts coming from different parts of the world in order to be able to see and validate women's personal experiences. In order to analyze the "political consciousness" of women in different parts of the world, as will be seen in the case studies, the actual processes that affect women and storytelling are very similar.

1.2. Storytelling as a Means of Reimagining Women's Social Positions

Studying such textual sites of representation results in finding ways to recognize female individuals' abilities to affect their social situations. Uncovering these acts of resistance is to acknowledge women writers' attempts in depicting women's struggles, beyond borders and offer strategies to women to change their prescribed social situations. As Lisa Disch observes, "feminists' most far-reaching challenge to the field may have begun, not by remedying women's putative absence from the historical record, but by contesting the very […] notion that history is primarily a field of stories about men and written by men" (787), which makes it a priority for feminist scholars to uncover and produce alternative "herstories," in turn.

Therefore, my research views storytelling as an act of resistance to community's hegemonic and gender-normative narratives as reflected in women's writings, which is in line with Zagarell's emphasis on the role of feminist scholarship in the identification of narratives of community. She notes that "feminist scholarship has rewritten social and cultural history and attended to […] women's lives, their cultural expression, and the particular intertextuality of women's writing" (507). Thus, literary studies of this kind could greatly contribute to the

rewriting of women's "social and cultural history," in order to show similar struggles and aspirations of women for social change, despite their cultural and linguistic differences.

In addition to storytelling, representation, as a significant feminist issue, will be highlighted in this study, to explore the lifelike depiction of female characters and alternative social spaces in their communities. Regarding the currency of representation in feminist scholarly work, Disch suggests that "the concept of representation may be second only to gender in its centrality to mid-twentieth century feminist theory and practice" (781). She also emphasizes the centrality of representation of women in everyday life in that theorists "have explored how the ways in which women are pictured, both materially and metaphorically, constrain their political action, equal exercise of rights, and general empowerment" (781). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, such everyday "representation[s] of women" in the women's writings could also be another way to determine how these textual representations of "everyday" practices of womanhood depict social realities of women in patriarchal societies around the world.

When looking at the representations of women in their communities in this study, we can see the male-oriented social structures and narratives, which have shaped women's experiences; women's storytelling then becomes their only way to escape this imposed social situation. As Marjorie DeVault in her "Language and Stories in Motion" points out, "If words often do not quite fit, then women who want to talk of their experiences must translate, either saying things that are not quite right, or working at using the language in non-standard ways" (6). This happens since "women speak in ways that are limited and shaped by men's greater social power and control, exercised both individually and institutionally" (98);In addition to

representing social realities, the alternative social spaces that these texts present are counter stories that female characters make up and tell to redefine their roles. Thus, the narratives these female characters find themselves in are the ones defined by male-centered institutions, while they often have the agency to replace them with their counter stories emerging from their own experiences with rule-following in their communities.

Responding to Spivak's famous work "Can the Subaltern Speak?"—indicating that the subaltern cannot truly speak—Disch adds that "neither can anyone else if speaking is conceived as direct transmission between subjects in a face-to-face encounter. […] the issue is not speaking, but being heard, and hearing is more like reading than it is like listening" (793). The need to be heard for women writers in male-oriented social orders is another recurrent theme in the texts in this study, so that a true outcome of this study of women's writings will be the existence of the seemingly similar textual representations, beyond borders, which require more transnational and inclusive rather than local or nationally-exclusive scholarships.

Representation, for Spivak, happens mainly in two forms, *Vertretung* and *Darstellen*. In an interview by Sarah Harasym, "Practical Politics of the Open End," Spivak clarifies her idea of representation. She identifies *Vertretung* as "stepping in someone's place" and "political representation" (108) and *Darstellung* as "proxy and portrait." She adds that "you do not 'simply' *Vertreten* anyone," but that *Darstellung i*s part of the representation as well:

> When I speak as a feminist, I'm representing, in the sense of *Darstellung*, myself because we all know the problems attendant even upon defining the subject as a sovereign deliberative consciousness. […] that way of representing: I speak for them and represent them. *Darstellung* them, portraying them as constituencies of

> feminism, myself as a feminist...unless the complicity between these two things is kept in mind, there can be a great deal of political harm. (108-109)

Spivak, therefore, points out the connection between the two modes of representation in that all representation eventually involves *Darstellung*. In doing so, she highlights the danger of representation in that for instance, there is no "crucial debate" over essentialism and non-essentialism, since "it is not possible not to be an essentialist, one can self-consciously use this irreducible moment of essentialism as part of one's strategy" (109). Representing others then is always a form of self-representation: "no representation—*Vertretung*, representation—can take place without essentialism. What it has to take into account is that the 'essence' that is being represented is a representation of the other kind, *Darstellung*" (109).

Disch comments on Spivak's two ways of representation as "political representation as speaking for" and "material and constitutive representation as picturing, depicting, portraying" (260), respectively. Provided that "the intersection of picturing and speaking for is the "place of practice" because it is in and through *Darstellungen* (competing representations of the represented) that *Vertereter* (would be representatives) vie for political authority" (793-794), a transnational perspective has the capacity to test both aspects of representation in a literary study.

It follows, then, that in their portrayal of women in their texts, women writers portray themselves on another level: the stories being told by and through female characters are examples of *Darstellung*, in that in writing about women's issues, the woman writer is representing and hence re(writing) herself as a woman. In sharing the feminist struggles and experiences of her female protagonists, in her *Vertretung* in the form of the stories she tells

about the female characters in her story, the woman writer is not speaking for other women, but as a woman through her representation.

Thus, I claim that through a comparative analysis informed by transnational feminism, unexpected similarities in women writers' representation and presenation are noticed between works belonging to different literary traditions once the differences are not overemphasized. As Francoise Lionnet suggests, scholarship on women's writings considered beyond borders "point to a third way, to the *métissage* of forms and identities that is the result of cross-cultural encounters, and that forms the basis for their self-portrayals and their representations of cultural diversity" (104). Whereas many literary studies have tried to show the way these instances of women's writings reflect the struggles of women in their respective social and national contexts; however, it is still an important task for literary comparatists to "cross borders" (Spivak 391), and continue to study the parallel attempts of writers writing from different cultures, and languages, who depict women's struggles, losses and triumphs in establishing their subjectivity in their shared yet particular patriarchal experience.

Regarding the necessity of more transnational literary studies, Susan Strehle in her *Transnational Women's Fiction: Unsettling Home and Homeland* further points out: "[i]n an age that knows itself in terms of globalized cultures and transnational economies and political systems, the study of literary canons enclosed within national boundaries is obsolete—and more, complicit with forms of dangerous and damaging nationalism that are widely repudiated in academic criticism" (5).Therefore, by looking beyond geographic or nationalist borders that categorize literary works, it is an important mission of transnational literary and feminist scholars to bring together various manifestations of women's expression around the world, in

order to, first, provide canonical space to understudied works of literature, and second, to push the boundaries beyond local signification of these works and to emphasize the possibility of a "third way."

A transnational study of the works of women writers can, therefore, highlight these parallel attempts around the world, as Laura Briggs puts it, in order to "[offer] an analytic, an optic on the nation with great deal of explanatory power about the articulation of the imperial and the national" (996). In her study, Briggs points out that transnational feminism was first used by Grewal and Kaplan "as an alternative to 'global' feminism," and adds that "they argued for attention to the heterogeneity of what globalization produces, not just a hegemonic West versus the rest or a Disneyfication of the world […]. They argued for attention to new activism, ideas, and forms of cultural production throughout the Third World particularly but not exclusively in relation to gender and capitalism" (992). This approach emphasizes the role of literary and cultural comparatists in bridging the gap between Western and non-Western literary representations, in order to receive literary recognitions and critical analyses on equal ground.

Thus, this transnational feminist study is concerned with representation of the social positions of women, portrayed as characters who are capable of challenging the hegemonic narratives—including a simplistic homogenization of women's situations—as represented in women's writings. As Mohanty suggests, the "binary terms" traditionally used to describe women's social experiences and to distinguish them from those of men are at best "reductive": "people who have [power] (read: men), and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited. Such simplistic formulations are historically reductive; they are also

ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions" (993). Similarly, despite their marginalized social situations, these writers rarely show female characters as mere victims of their social situations and instead highlight their attempts in every possible way to change oppressive narratives of their communities, as active agents of change in their communities.

For instance, many of these female characters find themselves at the mercy of gendered institutions of their communities, be it an enclosed religious community, a traditional family structure, or a suffocating marriage. The texts show their limitations and struggles by realistically depicting their lives as well as those of other members of the community and their relationships with one another. It is through these interactions that the true dynamics of their situations become observable. Moreover, it is through the very structure of their communities and their relationships to their subjects that these characters are able to make their own alternate identities, make up their counter stories, and redefine their situations as women. Furthermore, in their attempts to reimagine themselves, they often redefine their communities' structure, showing the arbitrary nature of once-held grand narratives.

Based on a transnational feminist perspective then, the similar struggles and sufferings of women could be a potential shared ground for women's writings from different parts of the world to be studied, since "what binds women together is a sociological notion of the 'sameness'" (Mohanty 23) of their oppression. It is at this point that an elision takes place between 'women' as a discursively constructed group and 'women' as material subjects of their own history" (23). It is an objective of this study, therefore, to show not only the similar struggles women have, as reflected in their writings, but also to highlight shared ways in which

they are able to challenge and subvert dominant narratives at work in their communities in order to reimagine their desired identities.

This way, exploring and analyzing the processes of storytelling in these texts reveal the subtle representations of agency in female characters. As Dorothy Smith notes, "taking up 'gender' from within, exploring social relations gendering the particular local historical sites of women's experiences, means attending to specificities, not gender in the abstract, not as total, but as multiple and sometimes contradictory relations" (120). Such "multiple" processes in which women are able to tell their stories is what a transnational study of this kind can achieve by focusing on the detailed representations of such acts of resistance in women's writings.

Similarly, what makes the study of representations of women in this thesis different is these writers' depiction of female characters as active participants in their communities. Despite their socio-economic class, education, or social marginalization due to their being women, central female characters in the texts in this study are able to challenge and change hegemonic and normative narratives via their acts of resistance. Through characterizations in the texts these characters rise above being "passive products of socialization" and become the agents of change in their communities. These characters' unique abilities to transform their position through their stories, as depicted in these texts, therefore, sets them far apart from representations of women as victimized in their communities.

In order for these characters to be able to make credible stories and alternative social realities, they have to be part of the social games around them: in other words, as participating members, they need to know how to play with language games, such as the gender codes. As

Shari Stone-Mediatore also notes, “narrative representations of our lives […] affect not only how we record and remember history, but also how ruling institutions exercise power over us and how we resist such domination. […] storytelling can also ‘mobilize through writing’ insofar as strategically constructed stories can subvert and reclaim the identity categories that have regulated our lives” (938). Therefore, “strategic” storytelling becomes a way for these women writers not only to assert themselves, but also to change the rules of the social games and write a new version of women’s story worldwide through their personal experiences.

These writers’ portrayals of female characters’ ability to challenge the dominant narratives of their communities are comparable to what Michel de Certeau calls “ways of operating,” (“modes de faire”) which are the tools by which individuals “compose the network of an antidiscipline” (xiv-xv). The notion of “antidiscipline” that he introduces in his work is close to the idea of an outsider group that makes up their own set of rules against the dominant narratives. In order to explain these alternative options, he introduces the example of Indigenous subjects who “subverted [the imposed rituals, representations, and laws] not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept” (xiii). This process of using the same material to design an alternative space of being is also seen in the female characters’ strategies to challenge the social norms in these texts. De Certeau also recognizes the ways individuals use language: “users make […] transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules” (xiv). Female characters' ability to use dominant gender narratives and to adapt them “to their own interests” is also seen in the texts in this study.

These individual acts of resistant adaptation are interpreted by Richard Delgado as the most significant element of storytelling for "outgroups," in that "stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings. The cohesiveness that stories bring is part of the strength of the outgroup. An outgroup creates its own stories, which circulate within the group as a kind of counter-reality" (2412). Such "counter realities" created by many female characters' acts of storytelling in this study could be viewed as the ultimate objective of their acts of storytelling. Many of these female characters, as nonconformists to social rules, are among the "outgroups" in their communities and their stories become their alternative reality, their truth.

As will be seen in the case studies in Chapter 2, central characters, such as Dora in Murdoch's *The Bell*, find themselves surrounded by the dominant narratives of the community they enter; however, in order to find her identity and redefine her role as the different member in the community she is capable of being, she makes narrated counter-realities. While her counter story presents her newly imagined identity as an individual; it opens up new social spaces of being for other characters who can reimagine their stories in the community as well, inspired by Dora's act of resistance.

Female characters in these texts, similarly, tend to use familiar language games in their social structures in order to make alternative narratives for themselves through their stories. In Marjorie L. DeVault's words, "the power relations carried by language give [feminist scholars] particular force when we consider how women tell about distinctively gendered experiences, and when feminist scholars explore that process of telling" (16). These female

characters' use of language enables them to voice out their frustrations from a homogenizing community and gives them space to reimagine their realities.

The idea of the significance of language in discussing "distinctively gendered experiences" is also in line with Lynne Pearce's idea of the way women's writing could communicate their struggles through "rhetoric": "For rhetoric, in both every day and classical understanding, is understood to be a model of communication in which authors and/or speakers are consciously in control of their meaning; in which the subject is no longer the unwitting mouthpiece of a discourse or ideology, but its prime mover" (3). The characters' articulations and storytelling in the case studies in this study, therefore, become the agents of change. For instance, the representations of mainly cisgendered women as female narrators, focalizers, and storytellers in this study highlight their roles as the creators of alternative meanings in communities that try to silence and marginalize them as the outsiders, due to their different practices in the face of gendered and social norms. The question of having an individual narrative to define one's desired identity against a community's categorizations of gender norms is also of great significance in the selected works of fiction in this research.

Moreover, it is extremely important for the characters to be positioned in a setting where other characters are presented as foils to highlight the differences to and for the protagonists' marginality to matter, an issue which could prove challenging to the community's norms and rules, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. Through the juxtaposition of the central character with other characters in these texts, the power of dominant social norms is shown,

and the female character's differences through her social interactions within the communities can be emphasized.

Furthermore, literary creations by these women writers constantly revolve around not only the dynamics of socially marginalized women's interactions with the outside world (their immediate communities), but also their often-unrecognized ability to rise above their communities' hegemonic norms. Storytelling in these texts becomes a form of representation in that the writers represent female characters' experiences and struggles in their communities in order to redefine their identities. Moreover, through their central characters' counter-narratives and acts of storytelling, these writers offer new ways to women to reimagine their identities and to open up spaces of difference and contestation in these communities.

By portraying realistic images of their contemporary communities and characters in their stories, these writers provide a textual space that illustrates female characters' ability to make alternative narratives and to imagine new identities for themselves. Munro's fiction, for instance, has often "convey[ed] a lucid and certainly not always politically correct view of men and women, defying not only the ideology of male dominant culture, but also that of female and feminist minority groups" (Albertazzi 5). Lifelike portrayals of men and women in society, regardless of being "politically correct", therefore, is an essential feature of narratives of community.

By representing different social positions of women in their fiction, women writers in this study criticize heteronormativity in their contemporary societies. They create characters who can find and make their own social positions despite not fitting into the heteronormative narratives of their communities. Thus, they offer social possibilities for these characters to

reimagine their identities, through their contrast to their experiences and expressions of other characters in their textual communities. Their critiques to heteronormativity seen in these writers' communities open up new paths for their local readers and those around the world to imitate their artistic creations and to reimagine their identities in their societies.

1.3. Women Writers Creating Alternative Realities through Narratives of Community

The act of storytelling takes place either through the stories that the female characters tell or re-tell themselves and/or others or the stories that they make up as alternative realities through which they can reimagine their identities. In order to see how and in what ways these characters are able to use their stories, I offer a thorough study of the ways narratives and language games are constructed in communities. I am borrowing these terms with their contextual significance to develop a new perspective on the way women's writings can be read as sites of shared struggles that not only female characters but actual women face in their communities, while not positing a one-to-one correspondence between them.

Moreover, these narratives and their constituent language games are what characters use in the texts in order to make their stories and to subvert the patriarchal narratives of their communities. Metanarratives in this study signify stories with legitimizing social functions: stories that gain their legitimacy through social and religious doctrines and institutions they present or advocate such as religious or gendered institutions, whereas little narratives are the counter narratives that characters make in order to stand their ground and gain a voice of their own.

Once metanarratives and little narratives are detected and juxtaposed in the texts, however, their constituent parts, referred to here as language games, will be examined in order

to see how they can provide the textual space in communities to make stories and for the stories to make sense. In his *The Postmodern Condition,* Lyotard introduces these specific forms of narratives and makes three observations about language games:

> The first is that their rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are objects of a contract, explicit or not between the players [...]; the second is that if there are no rules, there is no game, that even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game [...]; the third remark is [...] every utterance should be thought of as a "move" in a game. (10)

In line with Lyotard's take on language games, women writers' depictions of resisting female characters in their texts change the rules of the social narratives (games). The fact that in any game, once a rule changes, the whole game will be different is suggestive of the significant role of every utterance, every little narrative, and every story in order to bring about a change in the structure of the community in which it occurs. Therefore, it is not just the character who can change the rules of the social games she is taking part in, but the woman writer who can bring about change in the structure of her community—in the social situation of women—by presenting alternative social spaces for change through her utterance. While in their stories, the author temporarily changes the conditions for the characters and affects the social structures, she brings about a wave of possibility for change in a rigid system. Moreover, by depicting these transient moments in her writing, the woman writer (re)presents the community and the individuals' positions in it in the ways she feels it could/should be.

This way, the woman writer, through the depiction of characters within these textual communities, becomes the storyteller of her time. The writer's contemporary society as

depicted in her fiction becomes the textual space depicting struggles and social issues of her time, as well as a way for her to reimagine the social changes she deems necessary and possible. For instance, in her autobiographical[10] writings, Daneshvar depicts her observations of discriminatory social and cultural spaces by comparing her experiences living both in the United States and in Iran in mid to late twentieth century. These socio-political observations of women's position in their contemporary society is often echoed in their fiction as well.

As an important backdrop of the study of social narratives and language games, both Lyotard and Wittgenstein emphasize the role of the community for language games in order for them to make sense to individuals. Since the role of the other characters in strengthening a community's hegemonizing practices is foregrounded in most texts in this study, "rule-following" is another important concept to be explored. The others' perception of an individual's action regarding language games, as David Bloor argues, is the only validating criterion for an action as "right" or "wrong" as established and followed by others:

> I call this continuation right because others call it right, but I am correct in calling it right on this basis because their calling it right makes it right. The rightness to which I refer is constituted by their references to its rightness, and my reference of course, contributes to the phenomenon to which all the other speakers in their turn refer. (35)

As Bloor suggests, therefore, the role of others in the internalization of hegemonic narratives is notable, which could explain why female characters in this study are not willing to

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[10] In her *Simin Daneshvar's Letters to Jalal-e Ale Ahmad*, which is not part of this study.

be part of specific games of their communities' homogenizing social and religious institutions. These characters who face discriminations in social situations do not desire to be the role players of doctrines they neither practice nor believe in. The character's individuals' agency, however, in making use of language games provides spaces for these characters to generate their little narratives. These narratives are often small and temporary, while capable of creating disruptions in the system, which also confirms their liberating rather than confining nature. Delgado also emphasizes the power of stories to form communities:

> [m]ost who write about storytelling focus on its community-building functions: stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. Counter-stories, which challenge the received wisdom, do that as well. They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. (2414)

Therefore, for "the new possibilities" to emerge, individuals should be given space to tell their stories. Furthermore, the processes of storytelling are directly related to the relationships between individual and community, which are embedded in the way language games and narratives function. Danielle Fuller also recognizes the importance of textual communities in providing spaces for "writing the everyday" when she argues that "textual communities offer an arena in which the politics of language and power can be actively engaged and negotiated within a group" (8). Thus, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, the study of communities and their use of narratives in this research is also a significant way to determine the female characters' roles in challenging and/or altering hegemonizing narratives of their communities.

In line with the importance of community in these texts, depicting everyday life is another shared characteristic of these texts. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, these writers create fictional communities that are modeled after realistic communities and institutions, through both representation of hegemonic community and the textual community made by counter-stories. In her study, *New Visions of Community in Contemporary American Fiction*, Magali Cornier Michael notes that "individual interests are always shifting as members enter and leave and as the interests of the individual member change. As such, communities have the potential to be inclusive and to create spaces for difference—although they can also function to ensure sameness through exclusionary practices" (12). Therefore, she emphasizes the close interrelations between the two specific functions of communities, inclusivity and marginalization of nonconformist individuals. Through this characteristic, the woman writer is able to show the everyday challenges of the female character to break free from her marginalized position.

Textual spaces in these instances of fiction are created in order to show the way communities affect characters' social situations. By depicting the everyday, the texts represent women and their social situations as they are seen by the writers in their contemporary societies. It is through this function of textual communities that social, and in specific, patriarchal communities' rules and structures can be unearthed. The way these texts depict social realities is through a reproduction of social spaces, which is equally significant in showing the issues regarding oppressions and limitations imposed on women in their societies. The represented social space, as Lefebvre argues, "is at once a precondition and a result of social

superstructures. The state of each of its constituent institutions calls for spaces—but spaces which they can then organize according to their specific requirements" (85).

The texts in this study best exemplify narratives of community that revolve around the relationship of the central female characters and their communities. These texts illustrate how the hegemonizing narratives of community are structured and their master narratives are imposed on the characters in order to position them within their expected social roles, as opposed to the ones they desire. It is not only through ISAs and institutions, but also through other characters' conceptions and interactions with the protagonist that the female character is positioned within her social situation. Moreover, while these characters are all portrayed in relation to their communities, the extent to which they can make and maintain their stories varies and calls for further explorations.

Moreover, characters are able to make their alternative social spaces through their stories through which the female characters can redefine their identities, when their communities deny them the social space in which they can change their position. In his study "Utopias of the New Right in J. G. Ballard's Fiction", Eric A. Ostrowidzki also points out that "misreading textual spaces as purely auto-referential, intertextual, or mimetic representations obscures the theoretical insight that imaginative geographies exist in an imminent, and hence productive, relation with materially embedded social space" (5). This statement confirms the dual function of these textual spaces in that not only they reproduce the social space of their societies, but they also show the possibility that "representations of space" are simultaneously "spaces of representation" (Lefebvre 16-17) for their desired social changes.

Through their acts of storytelling, these writers enable female characters to rewrite their social positions within textual communities, and create an, albeit imaginary, space where the rules and norms of their discriminatory communities no longer apply. As Rob Shields in his *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* suggests, "understandings and concepts of space cannot be divorced from the real fabric of how people live their lives. To do so would be like saying that culture is made up of beliefs and traditions but has no impact on how people live" (7). This observation is more or less in line with Lyotard's idea of culture in a "postmodern condition", where grand narratives can no longer hold, and where culture becomes merely "a patchwork of little narratives", generated by individual's little narratives. The characters' little narratives in the form of their stories offer them alternative spaces to reimagine their identities even if they would position them as the outsiders of their communities.

As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, Munro's "Friend of My Youth" and Daneshvar's "A City like Paradise" create textual spaces through which female characters are able to define their own little narratives and present their comparable alternative voices in their communities against the hegemonizing narratives of their communities. Making up and telling stories become characters' only way out of their patriarchal web. For instance, Daneshvar's "A City like Paradise" portrays a socio-economically marginalized female character, whose only means of being heard is through making and retelling her stories. Storytelling in the form of acts and processes of resistance will be further analyzed in these texts in the third chapter.

Based on the objectives of her study on the relationships between communities and characters, Zagarell's narrative of community provides a yardstick for examining the works' portrayals of social communities in this research. Zagarell's definition is one of the first attempts to outline a genre that forms a perfect platform for a comparative study of this kind. She defines narrative of community as texts that tend to depict the social structures that are anchored by the interactions of characters with the other members, or institutions of a community.

Zagarell points out that this genre "has been unrecognized for so long" (500), due to "the dominance of a canon thought to encompass the literary masterpieces deflected sustained critical and theoretical attention from 'noncanonical' literature" (504) and discusses the genre's characteristics in two texts by Sarah Orne Jewett and Flora Thompson. The connection between the two texts goes beyond national, or even chronological similarities: "[O]ne is nineteenth-century, the other twentieth; one has an established literary reputation, the other is not typically classified as literature at all" (515). The purpose of her study, therefore, is to highlight the function of a community in the text based on the interactions of the characters within it. This feature of Zagarell's work is inline with my study's focus on the reciprocal interactions of communities and individuals within these texts, despite their coming from different times and locations.

A distinct feature of narratives of community is their portrayal of characters and community which is foregrounded in the works that I have chosen for my study. In her reading of the selected texts, Zagarell further suggests that "storytelling as a process of negotiation with past tellings extends to the narrator […] the narrative makes central the process of storytelling

and conversation. Through the retellings of these stories, the community incorporates change and assimilates new members; it thus maintains its own continuity" (523), which emphasizes the mutual interactions of individuals and their communities through narratives.

As an example, the confrontation of characters and their community is often foregrounded in the fiction of Iris Murdoch. *The Bell* represents a religious community in which the central character is marginalized by its dominant narratives, as a result of her not following the rules. The community, with its emphasis on rule-following, and its dysfunctional members, denies the protagonist any sense of belonging and pushes her to a point where she decides to define her role in the community as an outsider. It is through her reimagination of her role in this community that she is finally able to not only find her way, but also challenge the social structure of the community. "Individualism," in this case, "is not necessarily detrimental to the community and can even revitalize communal values" (19), which is often the case in Murdoch's textual communities.

Therefore, in my work, the integration of characters in their communities is not often viewed in a positive light, in contrast to Zagarell's study (1989), which glorifies "community life" over "modern life" (503) in the stories she analyses and gives characters a sense of communal identity. I will also argue that narratives of community could highlight the marginalized situation of characters within the closed social spaces of a community. Such personal and social conflicts are often at the heart of the narratives: it is, in effect, out of these conflicts, and the character's consequent marginalization that the female character can reimagine her identity and can survive her community's hegemonizing narratives: her salvation is through her own

imagination and her own stories that she weaves in order to gain a voice in a community that denies her one.

Female characters' social marginalization and their struggles to find a way out of their community's hegemonic narratives is a dominant theme in Daneshvar's texts as well. The texts present the readers with a female protagonist who is set in a marginalized position compared to the other characters of the story. In "A City like Paradise" for instance, the central character's different and marginalized socio-economic situation does not stop her from making up her personal narratives and challenging her community into finding her desired social space to express herself. The other characters' function in the story gets very close to what Stella Bolaki names as "participant/observer [function] in a community, an individual who can both take part and keep critical distance" (33) in that it poses a sharp contrast to the protagonist's position in the text. The contrast that is often seen between the characters magnifies the marginalizing narratives of the community and emphasizes the central character's determination to challenge them. Similarly, Daneshvar's novel *Savushun* depicts the life of a woman affected by and affecting not only her personal and familial interactions, but also the socio-political changes of her society. *Savushun*'s Zari, the central character from whose point of view the story is narrated, is able to embrace her individual narratives and find comfort in them by actively opposing the dominant ideologies that surround her as a political act.

In order to show the interrelations of social communities and the female individual, Munro uses episodic narrative form in her short story collections that enables the characters to create textual spaces where they weave their own stories and gain the

agency to challenge their communities. As an example of narratives of community, *Lives of Girls and Women*, for instance, features what Zagarell defines as "narratives [that] proceed episodically; the particular sequence of episodes is generally less important than the episodes' repeated exemplification of the dynamics that maintain the community" (520). In such sequences, stories represent the different social tensions through multiple narrative levels and voices, which help readers to see the other characters' interaction with the main character and simulate the oppositions felt by her toward the rest of the community.

Furthermore, the distinctiveness of Munro's fiction, according to Howells, is that her stories "are private histories and their resonance sounds in the subjective lives of her protagonists, where identities are reinvented, and narratives of the past are reshaped to reveal hidden meanings" (6). The way Munro tries to portray these oppositions is by the narrative voices through which the stories are told. In her reading of "Friend of My Youth", Gayle Elliott notes that these textual spaces are "ways in which women writers attempt to transform the structures of narrative, reshaping at once the concept of the short story and the aesthetic evaluations which define the genre" (1); these are the ways that have enabled Munro to take a "different tack" (1) in order to write a form of fiction that foregrounds female social struggles and situations. While these texts show both male and female characters in their positions within the community, Munro's female characters become these stories' key storytellers.

A transnational study of this kind provides space for these texts to meet and highlights the points of contact between these texts around the world. This transnational space connects diverse experiences of women writers regarding the representations of women's socio-cultural

roles and norms in their specific social structures. Literary scholarship can highlight the function of these storytellers and their acts of storytelling. In her more recent writing on narratives of community, Zagarell points out that "[g]enres […] are not ahistorical models that somehow generate or determine literary works," while she recognizes the role of scholars and theorists in making it seem this way, and that genres "connote the recognizable sets of possibilities on which writers—and specific texts—draw" (438). Since this study's focus is on select twentieth century women writers from around the world, feminist transnational approaches provide the necessary analytical tools to highlight their connections. Moreover, theories of space, narratives, and language games facilitate the examination of acts and processes of storytelling that are often translated from a social space to a textual one in the selected texts. In Chapter 2, I will offer more theoretical aspects of the individual's position in the community and I will show how the case studies' representations and presentations connect despite their various socio-cultural contexts.

Chapter 2: Women Writing/Rewriting Social Spaces

Communities play a very critical role in the texts in this study: as the spaces where social interactions take place, communities, in this sense, become the sites where female characters are situated. Their situatedness and relational interactions become the means of representing patriarchal structures that surround the female characters. Through their main focus on depicting these communities and characters' interactions, these writers give readers a glimpse of these communities' institutions and female characters' positions in them. These authors show how these communities are constructed and function, and how the female character can challenge the dominant social structures in which she finds herself, by highlighting the homogenizing effect of these communities on herself.

This chapter will examine different structures of communities and dynamics of interaction with the female characters as depicted in Iris Murdoch's *The Bell* (1958), Simin Daneshvar's *Savushun* (1969), and Alice Munro's "Princess Ida" taken from her short story collection *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), as examples of "narratives of community" (Zagarell). As discussed in Chapter 1, narratives of community are texts that are constructed around central social structures, which I refer to as textual communities. Whereas all characters, living in these communities, are affected by social institutions in texts, the woman writer positions the marginalized female characters at the center of her story representing social rules and expectations in significant detail, in order to highlight and critique these discriminatory structures. One important common feature of these texts is that the life of a leading female character is the fulcrum around which a specific community revolves. These textual communities, comprised of gendered institutions, focus on one central female character whose point of view as narrator or focalizer of the text highlights the male-dominated social structures. Moreover, this character, who is at times herself the referent or addressee of social narratives, is challenged and affected by her social position and/or her interaction with other characters.

As I will argue in this chapter, these texts illustrate various characteristics of narrative of community since they, in Zagarell's words, "take as their subject the life of a community (life in 'its *everyday* aspect') and portray the minute and quite ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself as an entity" (499). Within these detailed accounts of the daily interactions of these characters with their communities' social institutions, these texts depict the intricate yet significant functions of norm-regulating institutions. In addition, these

narratives highlight the struggles of female characters who are often dissatisfied with patriarchal written and unwritten social rules in their communities. It is both through the authors' portrayal of characters in the texts and their acts of storytelling that these characters rise above being "passive products of socialization" (Smith 39) and become the agents of change in their communities.

These writers' narratives of community enable them to represent social institutions across different cultures to locate spaces of contestation, beyond borders. This task gains more urgency since despite the advances of feminist scholarships and movements in different disciplines, as Meryl Kenny argues, "[t]he majority of new institutionalist research is gender blind, failing to consider issues of gender and rarely drawing on feminist political science, despite a wide-ranging body of feminist work that is primarily concerned with political institutions" (95). This way, the study of depictions of social confrontations of female characters and their surrounding communities will highlight the gender-specific discussion of the ways social structures are formed in these texts, and how female characters can affect and change one another as a result of their dynamics.

Through representation, literary texts can efficiently show the character's acts of resistance within her social situation. As Murray and Chamberlain suggest, "narratives do not, as it were, spring from the minds of individuals but are social creations. We are born into a culture which has a ready stock of narratives which we appropriate and apply in our everyday social interaction" (53). We can then gain a better understanding of these social interactions by studying the depictions of these characters' everyday lives in these texts. It is through

comparing and contrasting these texts that we can see similar patterns of limitations and discriminations to which female characters are exposed.

Thus, in this chapter I will focus on the roles and positions of female characters in three different communities in an attempt to identify formal and informal manifestations and practices of institutions with regard to the specific participants' gender. This study's "gendered approach" will then contribute in a very limited way to an "enrich[ment of] new institutional analysis" (Kenny 95), as well as an examination of female individuals' position within and their resistance to their communities' normative systems. A short study of institutions, narratives, and individuals will follow to understand the ways individuals are exposed to, follow or reject social rules.

2.1. Individuals, Narratives, and Institutions

Narratives and their constituent language games are what characters use to make their individual stories in order to subvert the patriarchal narratives of their communities. Metanarratives in this study signify stories with legitimizing social functions: stories that gain their legitimacy through social and religious doctrines and institutions they present or advocate, whereas little narratives are the counter-narratives that individuals make to stand their ground and have a voice of their own.

Wittgenstein does not give a totalizing definition of language games in his works, as Chon Tejedor notes: "Wittgenstein insists that no such definition can be given, in that giving a definition involves giving the essential features of something and there are no essential features to language games" (119). The definition that Tejedor suggests, however, sums up the idea concisely: "language games are sections of language (fictional or real) that can be used as

examples to emphasize the idea that language is a purposeful activity [...] [language] is about acting with a purpose" (125). This definition, or better the lack of a unified one, makes this concept suitable for this study. The indefinability of language games in a general way makes the form ideal for social change through stories with their linguistic potentials, since this feature makes it possible to examine the changes individuals can make in the structure of metanarratives in their textual communities. While Wittgenstein seems to suggest that language games are fixed in order for the game to be played and for the utterances and actions to make sense, Lyotard considers the role of the players (or individuals) significant in keeping with or changing the rules and in shaping their own personal little narratives.

Lyotard, in his *Judging the Differend,* comments on the idea of "language games," which he has borrowed from Wittgenstein. In his analysis of Lyotard's ideas, Readings suggests that "Lyotard's use of Wittgenstein's 'language games' insists upon the pragmatic specificity or singularity of phrasings, their resistance to being incorporated into 'grand narratives' or metalanguages," (107) which are replaced by "little narratives," in postmodernism. Lyotard, like Wittgenstein, believes that it is not only the subjects' will that makes them play a game, but there are social games in which individuals are set to play: "The language game is not a subjective strategy, rather a subject is an effect of the language game: games play individuals rather than vice versa" (Lyotard 51). Therefore, instead of tracing language games in the world, we should think of them as the very building blocks of "reality": "Nor are language games situated 'in the world'; reality or the world is a pragmatic position constructed by each language game" (Readings 107). Human interactions in communities, therefore, could be regarded as individuals playing language games.

In other words, any social interaction depicted in these texts is likewise a language game taking place in the community. For instance, in male-dominated communities, one way to play the social game according to the rules is to conform to the double standards set for women; however, the female protagonists in these texts resist such rules and therefore change the game by changing their move. When this happens, either the social game changes—not necessarily to her benefit—or the game as the social structure is abolished altogether since it thereby loses its capacity to structure the social order. Murdoch's *The Bell*, which will be analyzed in this chapter, will show this inability of the community to function after Dora, the central character, challenges the rules and the central narrative of the abbey.

Moreover, each move in this game involves different roles: "[A] phrase belongs to a language game in that it is a move in the pragmatic universe implied by the language game: each move implies a sender, an addressee and a referent. Thus, to take the analogy of chess, each move carries with it a set of rules governing what moves may be made at any point" (Readings 107). This quality of language games is precisely why they could be thought of as both shaping communities' very rules and institutions and giving the individuals the tools to make up their own narratives. While I will discuss this point further in the next chapter, it should also be emphasized here that it is in this context of a chess-like game of various "right" and "wrong" moves from which the character has the possibility to deviate and eventually change the game.

In this regard, Readings points out that these games are governed by some accepted rules in order to play the players. Readings adds that "[t]hese rules situate both the players and dictate the significance of the move" (107), and that by analyzing these language games we can

uncover the function of narratives in texts, since "for Lyotard it is a way of focusing upon the performativity of language":

> What is important is the way in which *Just Gaming* links Kant to Wittgenstein so that to insist that doing justice in a field of language games consists of resisting the pretensions of certain language games to provide the rules for other games, to become metalanguages [...]. Thus, in each language game we must try to judge without importing criteria from other games, such as that of theory (which tries to give criteria to all games). The language game, in Lyotard's reading, thus demands an indeterminate judgement, without criteria, on a case-by-case basis. (Readings 107)

By emphasizing the games on a "case-by-case basis," Readings highlights the significance of context in the formation of these language games and the way they play individuals and by extension, individuals play and "unplay" them, in their obedience or deviance from the norm. Rules gain their power from the community members' adhering to them, so anyone who decides to challenge the rules of engagement or not to participate in this game is, in fact, affecting it. Once a rule is changed, the overall social structure will not hold as before, thus individual acts have a wider social berth as a consequence. As Malcolm suggests and Bloor also discusses at length in his *Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions,* rule following, therefore, is an important feature of maintaining community.

Based on Malcolm's idea of rule-following, the individual learns to follow rules by playing the same language games in similar contexts, so that the role of others gains

importance when it comes to following rules. It is through others' testing, correcting, and confirming of the individual's actions that he succeeds in playing the language games correctly. Others, then, have the power to determine the "rightness" of an individual's acts. This way, he explains, the "rule" is set when it is agreed upon and followed by others, which happens by teaching and learning the language games: "[T]he rule 'exists' in and through the practice of citing it and invoking it in the course of training, in the course of enjoining others to follow it, and in the course of telling them they have not followed it, or not followed it correctly. All of these things are said to others and to oneself and are heard being said by others" (35). While Bloor highlights the role of others in learning how to follow the rules correctly, Malcolm adds that once a rule is set, it will form an extension when followed: "The word 'agreement' and the word 'rule' are related to one another; they're cousins. The phenomena of agreement and of acting according to a rule are interdependent" (148). Thus, there can exist no game without the idea of a community in which everyone is supposed to follow a certain set of rules.

Therefore, a rule is valid once it is followed by a community and in this way is "extended." Malcolm adds that "the rule and nothing but the rule determines what is correct. Wittgenstein puts the question as follows: 'But what if the actions of different people in accordance with a rule, do not agree? Who is right, who is wrong?'" (137). The fact that either group of people following or breaking the rules can be right or wrong is a primary opposition Lyotard challenges in his thesis on "postmodernity" where he raises the issue of the invalidity of grand narratives and metanarratives that establish rules is raised.

Language games constitute narratives, which are directed and maintained by institutions. Institutions are erected either by governing authorities or through collective agreements between individuals. It is therefore important to study different structures of institutions in order to understand the role of individuals within them. From a feminist perspective and the point of view of the present research, studying women's positions and roles in these institutions is critical to understanding the reciprocal functions of the individual and the community. As Celeste Montoya observes, “institutions are not merely one target for analysis, but really are at the very heart of feminist analysis" (367), since female individuals' identities are constructed and studied within the social structure in which they are set. In other words, to study what it means to be a woman, it is important to find the norms and written and unwritten rules of being a woman in a community.

Moreover, an analysis of language games helps trace the ways women are defined and positioned in a community. Jane Duran, in her article “Wittgenstein, Feminism, and Theory,” suggests that “Wittgenstein’s general preoccupation with language and his early attempts to delineate areas of precision are […] valuable points of departure for feminist theory” (322). Many commentators on Wittgenstein have tried to highlight intersections of feminist studies and Wittgenstein’s ideas in his *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*.

As Hilde Lindemann Nelson in her article “Wittgenstein Meets ‘Woman’ in the Language-Game of Theorizing Feminism” points out, thinking about the category “woman,” however arbitrarily, helps pinpoint my concerns in contemporary feminist scholarship since “a deep skepticism about using gender as an analytical category at all can be so paralyzing that we lose sight of feminism as critique—as the struggle for a better understanding of the way social

life is and ought to be" (221). In her attempt to theorize feminism based on Wittgenstein's idea of language games, she further discusses the idea of "family resemblance" in language games in that "differences among the players can be respected and put to good use by conceptualizing the members of the coalition as having no core defining characteristic, but rather, bearing a family resemblance to one another" (229). Thinking about the category of woman in something other than a fixed, prescribed way also paves the way for this study's presuppositions in that texts dealing with different representations of women could still engage in a conversation with one another.

The prescribed monolithic category of woman as narratively defined in many communities, however, is in stark contrast to the diverse range of lived experiences of women. Patriarchy as a widespread system of power can only function based on the social rules it produces and the institutions that influence individual's lives. Thus, patriarchal social structures as "overarching systems of power" require women to conform to a set of social norms in any given community to fit in the predefined category, which would leave women of color's experiences of patriarchy at a disadvantaged position that "interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment" (Crenshaw 1249). These social norms, consequently, have been designed to "[organize] society to advantage men," and in much transnational feminist scholarship, "institutions entrench male power and are important sites for contestation" (Montoya 367). It is through the existence and maintenance of these norms, therefore, that these institutions function, and it is through individual attempts that these institutions are challenged their resistance to the prescribing language games that surround them and validating their experiences.

Textual representations of the interactions of communities and female characters, therefore, are good examples of such social structures in which the ways individuals and communities influence one another are highlighted. In order to compare and contrast these ways, I will examine the texts in this chapter based on the four feminist categories Montoya introduces in her discussion of institutions: “gender within institutions,” “gendered institutions,” “gender as an institution,” and “institutions as producers of gender” (368). While all three texts in this chapter feature “gendered institutions” and “gender as an institution,” the degree to which they engage the other two categories will be evaluated by close analyses of the texts. While the characters in each case have no choice but to live in their “gendered institutions,” they try to redefine their positions within them and reimagine what it means to be a woman in their communities.

As narratives of community, these texts represent instances of gendered institutions, which come into play when we “recognize that construction of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily culture of the institution rather than existing out in society or fixed within individuals” (Kenny 456). Thus, based on these principles determining gender behaviour, female characters are constantly faced with barriers in the expressions of their differences as a result of being a woman in a male-centered community. While the kind and intensity of the characters' social constraints differ in each case study, these texts share these inherent conflicts. In other words, these characters cannot practice their ideas of womanhood as they desire since their existence and functionality tend to be defined by institutions created by men and maintained through male-centered ideologies and value systems in these textual communities. While women have the agency to go against these

norms, they often do so at the cost of being categorized as community outsiders and disrupters of the system, as will be seen in the textual analyses.

Moreover, formal institutions often establish gender codes within their structures. An institution does not treat its members equally when it makes rules based on gender differences. As an example, it is through establishing a system in which there are sharp distinctions between how different sets of rules apply to men and women in determining whether they are accepted as members of a religious community. While formal institutions are generative systems that regulate individuals' behaviours inside them, informal institutions—formed through the majority of members' interpretation and adherence to norm—are also capable of creating numerous social codes and categories for individuals based on their genders.

For instance, a social structure or a community can create gender categories based on what is acceptable for or expected from an individual based on their gender, not necessarily according to a set of written rules, but a communal agreement. In *The Bell*, for example, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Dora's presence in the abbey as a woman is challenged from the very beginning, since she is not following the specific rules that the senior members enforce on women. Dora faces limitations in her participation in the community based on the fact that women's position in this institution, as represented by other female characters in the abbey and not as a direct result of the religious laws, is predefined and that she does not fit in and is categorized as an outsider. Thus, as will be seen in *The Bell,* the abbey is a gendered community which functions based on unwritten consensus by the members on what is and what is not a woman's role and her position within it.

Gendered Institutions—whether formal or informal—are in fact the ones that define gender norms based on their members' gender identification. Formal institutions can limit an individual's participation or membership in the community, and consequently can make them be favoured by the gender they prioritize and reward. For instance, traditionally speaking, the literary canon has belonged to logocentric, male-dominated social institutions that have driven many women writers into limiting their participation in publicizing their works of art and being received or recognized as artists, primarily based on their gender identification, so that a woman writer was supposed to write like a man in order to gain recognition (See Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*).

While formal institutions provide the rules for the extent and ways of individuals' participation in the community, informal institutions are "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (Helmke and Levitskey 727). Although they are sometimes referred to as "social institutions" or "culture," they could be mainly thought of as the prevalent existence of institutions in pieces of ordinary individuals' lives that are not necessarily enforced by official organizations. One example of an informal institution is the social dominance of the unwritten norms around motherhood. As seen in a case study that follows, a mother could be labelled "eccentric" when she does not conform to the norms of the community.

Through the study of institutions, not only the fabric of a community and its spaces of conformity and contestations become visible, but as Meryl Kenny suggests, the study of informal institutions also "highlight[s] the 'unintended consequences and inefficiencies' of existing institutions" (92). We also deal with informal institutions in social settings when it

comes to human interactions, in addition to formal institutions; this study will take a close look at the way female characters treat rules in their personal ways or the ways they extend formal institutions into their personal relationships. Informal institutions will be highlighted and studied in these texts by the examination of the textual communities, characters' interactions with each other and their positions in different social settings as either members of the community or as outsiders.

Gender as an institution (Montoya 368) is another category in the study of institutions that I will use in my analysis. Due to numerous formal and informal social institutions' treatment of gender as a defining factor of women's participation in communities, gender itself can be regarded as an institution. Patriarchy, through its various forms, has fomented discriminatory and at times discriminatory rules and codes of behaviour prescribed for women throughout history, and dictated rules for prevailing expectations of women's roles in social institutions. Thus, being a woman alone defines the female individual's identity even before she enters any other social institutions, by automatically positioning her within a system of predefined codes. So long as she is not a man—not belonging to the privileged social class—the female individual's participation in male-centered communities is directly affected and constrained by patriarchal social structures. Furthermore, through foregrounding this institution, each of these writers critiques the heteronormative boundaries of their communities and emphasizes the ways in which her contemporary women can push them and redefine their social positions.

As an example, Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* portrays a society in which identifying as a woman already positions the character in a whirlwind of discriminatory social

rules. Such a gendered social surrounding does not allow women to gain equal space nor provide them the opportunity to actively participate in and be recognized for their contributions or even achievements, and instead punishes them. In other words, if a woman is automatically recognized as an individual who is not a man and not eligible for certain tasks, she will consequently be denied the privileges of being regarded as a significant and vital part of any other institutions to which she belongs. Moreover, gender itself, in being a woman—as opposed to being a man—predefines women's roles and positions in their communities. As a result of the predefinition of their gender roles, female characters in these texts are often dissatisfied with their communities' existing gender-regulating structures and tend to constantly challenge them and push their boundaries to gain their right place in these institutions.

In each of these texts, the female character feels a gap between how she views herself and imagines her identity and the ways in which a woman's position and role are defined in her community. The protagonist then tends to challenge and break free from the frames that are set in place for her and tries to find her place within the existing language games. While her self-identification comes at a price and at the very least she is identified as "different" or eccentric by others—as in the case of "Princess Ida"—she accepts these imposed labels as her only alternative way of living her story in the world.

While female characters often have a choice to either participate in social institutions, or be treated as outsiders, it is only through conforming to the rules that they can be associated with others and become privileged members of these social structures. In order to be accepted members of their communities and specifically in their social interactions, not only do these

characters need to belong to a community as social beings, but they also need to conform to patriarchal social norms of femininity in order for others to accept them as an "ideal woman" in the community. In doing so, they are assigned mandatory participation in social structures and practices that deny them a voice of their own to define their identities.

However, the individual's agency comes into play since "gendered institutions depend on individuals' willingness to 'do gender.'" When individuals refuse to perform in accordance with gender conventions, they can change institutions. In other words, whereas it is a more gradual process for the whole social structure to change as a result of their actions, the female characters in this study often have the agency to resist and/or go against discriminatory and confining social rules defined for them, by not following the rules.

In her *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), Silvia Federici provides a socio-historical analysis of women's roles in Europe and suggests a historical development for the socio-economic construction of femininity in its dominant association with negative qualities throughout history. She points out that in the 16th and 17th century women "lost ground in every area of social life" (100). She adds that "from the pulpit or the written page, humanists, Protestant reformers, counter-reformation Catholics" (101) "vilified" womanhood and defined it as a fixed entity. Through these vilifications, this fixed entity was characterized by some specific qualities such as being "unreasonable, vain, wild, wasteful" (101). She further observes that "the main female villain was the disobedient wife, who together with the 'scold,' the 'witch,' and the 'whore' was the favorite target of dramatists, popular writers and moralists" (101). All these qualities are what have become inherent in the fabrication of gendered social norms. It is through these socio-historical vilifications and a direct result of denying economic agency to

women, Federici suggests, that "the definition of women as demonic beings, and the atrocious and humiliating practices to which so many of them were subjected left indelible marks in the collective female psyche and in women's sense of possibilities," (102) which will be seen in depictions of female characters in the case studies in this chapter.

The case studies in this chapter will illustrate the process of rule-following and confrontations of the character and the community in different forms. While all these female characters are faced with social constraints in finding their positions in these communities, they are nevertheless able to redefine themselves against the oppositions they face. My analysis of Munro's "Princess Ida," for instance, focuses on the role of the central character and those of others around her to establish her identity. It is through others' perceptions and categorizations of the two protagonists' stories woven through the daughter's narration that these characters' "eccentric" strategies are highlighted. In addition, Daneshvar's *Savushun,* different ways in which the community subjugates female characters will be illustrated and it will further explore the ways in which the protagonist challenges and changes her confinements and reimagines her identity. The analysis of Murdoch's *The Bell*, at the end, offers a view on the struggles and strategies of the protagonist in a religious community and in relation to other female characters.

By being narrated or focalized from a female character's point of view, these texts can show first-hand experiences and struggles of these characters as the outsiders who need to change in order to become an accepted member of the community. Not only do these texts connect to one another having been written by women writers' experiences of their contemporary societies, they also represent shared experiences of women in different

patriarchal communities. It is interesting to note that, as the analyses will demonstrate, the dominant normative language games characters have to practice in order to be recognized as members of these communities are often similar across diverse cultural contexts.

2.2. *Princess Ida*: Dubbing Willfulness as Eccentricity

Alice Munro's “Princess Ida” (1971) is a short story taken from her collection, *Lives of Girls and Women.* As Jane Smiley in her "Introduction" to the collection suggests, this work “is semi-biographical—it takes place in rural Ontario; the protagonist […] seems to be the same age as the author would have been in 1940s” (x). The story, like the whole collection, is narrated from Della’s point of view, a young girl depicting her coming of age experiences with her mother, Ada, from whom she feels estranged and yet with whom she finds shared interests and attitudes. Growing up, her mother's “eccentricities” as she calls them, are highlighted by Della and tend to constantly hurt her. Her internal conflict is caused by witnessing the hostile attitudes of others towards her mother and hearing their comments: “I felt the weight of my mother's eccentricities, of something absurd and embarrassing about her—the aunts would just show me a little at a time—land on my own coward shoulders. I did want to repudiate her, crawl into favour, orphaned, abandoned, in my wrinkled sleeves” (61). Della’s suffering in the story stems mainly from her two aunts’ comments as representatives of other women in their immediate community. Their constant mocking of her mother’s “eccentric” ways represents the community’s collective perspectives on how a woman is expected to be.

What is seen as a community in this story is created through the collective voice of women around Della and her mother. The two aunts who are present throughout the story

seem to be the mouthpieces of the community. The story, told from the perspective of a young girl coming of age, illustrates how she is disciplined into adopting a certain definition of womanhood by her very conservative great aunts who critique implicitly and explicitly her own mother's behaviour, from the way she dresses to her independent lifestyle.

Her mother's differences, however, as witnessed from the story's plot, are merely depicted as practices that would be considered out of "norm" for a woman to do in this community such as "driving recklessly" or "spreading her knowledge." Della, however, shares her mother's state of mind to a great extent while the mother's behaviour and independent lifestyle—different from other women in the community—including her father's aunts, makes her an eccentric in the community and a source of embarrassment to Della.

Ada, however, believes in her own nonconformist way of life, the value of being educated and educating others, and in being financially independent, which are unconventional and unacceptable to the great aunts. Additionally, Ada does not seem threatened by the judgments and cold shoulders of other women and does not understand why she would need protection in Della's opinion. Della describes her mother as a strong woman who does her best to find her place in the community through her own means:

> [F]rom such a vantage point, my mother did seem a wild woman. […] She drove our thirty-seven Chev over all the highways and back roads of Warwanash County, drove it over gravel roads, dirt roads, cow tracks, if she thought they might lead her to customers. […] [S]he was continually worried that the wooden bridges would not hold, and she would never let anything force her on to the treacherous crumbling shoulders of the road. (61-62)

While Ada has her fears of things that could go wrong, she seems to be a woman who has found her way out of being trapped in a community that denies women a different way of being outside its predefined norms and established confinements. Self-education and resistance in the face of limitations seem to have become Ada's strategies to reimagine herself as a woman. Thus, Della, the narrator of the story, was born and raised in a community where women in her family have paid a high price for being educated. Gaining knowledge and self-education has been the way for her mother, grandmother, and great grandmother, to fashion their own ways of being in the world. Ada pays the price of taking on difficult tasks in order to contribute to her society by educating others through her writing for the local paper or selling encyclopedias. She takes great pleasure in gaining and sharing her knowledge in different fields, in a community that does not reward this behaviour and treats her as an outsider. What distinguishes her from the other women, including the aunts, is her different practices as a woman.

As an example of her different performance as a woman, Ada sees no problems in sharing with everyone her gained knowledge from the encyclopedias she sells: "Knowledge was not chilly to her, no; it was warm and lovely. […] she could get carried away, telling about such things; she would tell anybody" (62). The reaction Della would get from her aunts would be that "your mother does such a lot of things, my." Therefore, acquiring knowledge and the ability to share what one knows with others becomes a source of embarrassment and unease to Della, an experience that teaches her to see knowing more as a threat to her being recognized as a normal woman. In a conventional community—the kind exemplified by her husband's aunts and the kind which does not value educated women—Ada becomes the eccentric. .

In line with the problematic subject, Sarah Ahmed, in her *Willful Subjects*, defines "willfulness" as "political art, a practical craft that is acquired through involvement in political struggle, whether that struggle is a struggle to exist or to transform an existence" (133). Therefore, based on this definition, in order to act politically, the individual persists despite the apparent limitations and oppositions in her surrounding, becomes "willful", a characteristic that I will come back to in the other analyses in this chapter as well. Ada's refusal to practice the conventional narratives of being a woman in her community automatically makes her the reason for her own exclusion. It is similar to the little girl, in Sara Ahmed's analysis of the "Willful Child", her "audacity [and] standing against, [her] creativity" (134) that distinguish her from the rest and make her an error in the system. In this informal institution, where the law is the will of the majority of women, Ada becomes the problem and a threat that needs to be addressed for the survival of the conventional narratives regarding womanhood.

Once Ada is labelled "eccentric" and rejected from the insider group, everything about her life becomes questionable and a laughing matter to other women. Any person or behavior can be labelled as eccentric as far as it is different from another's, a point that is ignored in communities and puts the lie to their collective attempts to homogenize people's behaviours. Others' enforcement of these rules ultimately makes it possible for everyone's social position to be threatened and for everyone to be viewed as eccentrics, anomalies, and outsiders. Hannah Arendt, in her *Human Conditions,* points out the shared quality of individual eccentricity and difference in a positive way. The quality to start a new way, to part ways with the old traditions and new beginnings, Arendt argues, are human conditions every individual shares:

> With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before […]. The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty […] the fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely probable. (177-78)

While the function of social institutions is to homogenize and eliminate traces of difference between their members according to "the statistical laws and their probability," the very quality of going and acting against the grain is to be human, in Arendt's opinion. This is precisely where the function of individuals' unique existence in the formation, maintenance, and abolition of communities is seen in the text. While Ada tries to connect to others the way she can, she is not ready yet to forfeit her individual capacity to be different, be willful and stand out from the crowd, the way her mother does.

For instance, in a party that Ada throws in an attempt to mingle with others and open a way to communicate with them, she cannot escape her guests' comments and hurtful remarks regarding the way she is dressed, sings or delivers her speeches. Once, Della hears her aunts—keeping "busy in the kitchen, smiling and affronted"—commenting on her mother's choice of clothing, Della starts to hear the jokes and becomes conscious of other women's actual reactions towards her mother: "after that it did seem to me the party was less beautiful than I had supposed; I noticed some ladies were not playing games, that my mother's face was feverish with excitement and her voice full of organizing fervour" (69). By distinguishing her

mother's change of mood and voice, Della is able to see and feel her mother's difficult position in hosting the party and ignoring others' hurtful remarks. While she remains doubtful of her mother's right to be different, it is important to note that on a different level, she sympathizes with Ada. In this party, through everyone's interactions with her mother, she realizes how her every move is scrutinized by others in this community.

In addition to being rejected from the community as an eccentric, her mother's different way of being a woman results in her being ridiculed for her close friendship with her lady boarder. She is the only woman seen interacting with her mother in a friendly way, which gives her a position in the community not far from Ada's. Right after the party in which her mother and the boarder play and sing a song together about unrequited love to entertain their guests, raising eyebrows among the other women, the aunts do not leave Della alone with their mocking comments.

> [A]untie Grace and Aunt Elspeth would in fact say to me, off and on for the next year, "how is that ladyboarder of yours? How is she finding life without her lover?" I would explain to them that it was a song from an opera, a translation, and they would cry, "Oh, is that it? And we were all the time feeling so sorry for her!" (69)

It is through these comments that the text seems to imply that Ada's mother is viewed and categorized as eccentric. Her unusual attachment to and relationship with the boarder seem to be the central yet hushed reason why other women refuse to connect with her or recognize her as one of their own. In this example, therefore, Ada's nonconformist behaviour is sharply contrasted to the other women's upholding the conventional narratives around womanhood and their demand of heteronormativity. The critiques continue when Ada starts a

correspondence course and regularly writes for a newspaper: “[S]he used nom de plume Princess Ida, taken from a character in Tennyson whom she admired” (77). Ida, the female protagonist of Tennyson's “The Princess,” is a woman who builds a university for women where men were prohibited to enter. The poem has a revolutionary topic for its time. The story’s allusion to this poem is indicative of Ida’s attempts—as a willful subject—to live the way she desires.

The reactions of others to her mother's new interest add to Della's problem: "[O]ther people than Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace would say to me, ‘I seen that letter of your mother's in the paper’” (77). Della was sometimes embarrassed by being the subject of her mother’s letters and felt "contemptuous" and envious of people like her aunts in "how superior and silent and enviable they were, those people who all their lives could stay still, with no need to do or say anything remarkable […]. I myself was not so different from my mother, but concealed it, knowing what dangers there were" (77). Della is torn between following her desire for an unconventional life and succumbing to the community's expectations of her as a woman.

Della’s point of view in the story, as a young subject of this community is significant in depicting the formation of women’s identity in the face of communities’ hegemonic narratives. She is directly affected by other women's reactions to her mother's life choices, and yet constantly denies her ability or willfulness to present herself to others in similar, unconventional ways. She is mirroring her mom’s image while she is concerned with the role of others in making up her image as well:

> I shared my mother's appetite myself, I could not help it. I loved the volumes of the encyclopedia, their weight (of mystery, of beautiful information) as they fell open in my lap […] accidentally at first and then quite deliberately I learnt things from the encyclopedia. I had a freak memory. Learning a list of facts was an irresistible test to me. I put on a shrewd, serious, competitive look, but that was mostly for effect. Underneath I felt a bounding complacency. I knew I knew it. And who could fail to love me, for knowing where Quito was? (63)

As a child, Della appeals to others talking about her learnings and memorizations from the encyclopedia; however, in the community's rejection of her mother, she can see an image of her own future self. As a young girl, she understands and shares her mother's interest and pride in gaining and sharing knowledge that she loves yet feels threatened by the possibly of becoming an outsider to her community. While Della feels strong negative emotions towards her mother as a result of her differences, she is nonetheless committed to protecting her mother from the aunts as well as other women who constantly tend to criticize and judge her mother's actions: "[A]t the same time I wanted to shield her. She would never understand how she needed shielding, from two old ladies with their mild bewildering humour [and] their tender proprieties" (61). This self-reflexive quote also emphasizes the significance of having Della as the narrator, who is able to distance herself not only from the other women but from her mother as well. In doing so, she makes her voice as an observer distinct from the mother as the main character of the story and shows the way Della views her mother—not merely from the point of view of a daughter but as another woman in this community.

While Della tries to protect her mother from the hurtful comments of her aunts, she eventually decides to rid herself of what could make her another “eccentric” like her mother: "[O]ne day I did not want to do it anymore. The decision was physical; humiliation prickled my nerve-ends and the lining of my stomach. I started to say, 'I don't know them—but was too miserable, too ashamed, to tell this lie'” (64). As a child, she feels an overwhelming pressure from two different sets of language games. On the one hand, she is faced with a double standard regarding the position of women and knowledge in the way a woman "should" act and what a different position it is from that of a child. As a child, she is not held to the same unwavering conventions of accepted womanhood. On the other hand, she sees her own interest and her mother's constant encouragement to keep doing what she loves coming at the cost of losing her social status as an agreeable accepted woman in her community.

By abiding by the first set of rules, therefore, Della becomes an acceptable member of the community, at the cost of parting ways with her own interest and talent. Moreover, Ada reminds her daughter that she has also witnessed the burden of others’ hurtful reactions toward her but has chosen to disregard them. In telling her daughter that "shyness and self-consciousness" are "the luxuries [she] could never afford" (64), Ada is confirming the same notion that giving in to her feelings regarding others' thoughts and treatments of her would have ended up in her inability to pursue her own way of being in the world. In other words, she has also had to pay the price of being excluded from the community to pursue knowledge, and that it has not been possible for her to win on both sides.

In witnessing her mother’s position in her community, Della seems to have learnt what it is and is not to be a normal, accepted image of a woman. In the collectively shared ideals of

other women and other young girls she can see ways to step away from the anomaly her mother represents. As a young girl, she prefers to be just like the "beautiful, shining girls, whose names everybody knew—Margaret Bond, Dorothy Guest, Pat Mundy—and who in turn knew nobody's name, except if they chose" (67), and she knows it is only through embracing these values that she would be able to be popular and escape her mother's bitter reality. Della, caught between two desires, does her best, then, not to be associated with what she desires to be—a woman like her mother—but what makes her be loved by others.

Ada, however, is no stranger herself to how Della feels towards her mother. She keeps telling Della about Della's grandmother, whom she has known from photographs, as a "kneeling woman, who at other times is discovered flat on her back and weeping for reasons my mother does not go into—with a damp cloth pressed to her forehead" (71). Della's comment shows that her mother's emphasis in telling her grandmother's life story falls on her religiosity and what made Ada be "cured […] of religion for life" (72), and not the fact that she spent her life secluded and unhappy. She narrates a story to Della about her grandmother's "eccentric" behaviour in giving away all her inherited money to buy and then give away fine Bibles to people, despite her family's poverty:

> She inherited some money. Some of her people had money, they lived in New York state. She came into two hundred and fifty dollars, not a lot of money, but more then than now and you know we were poor […] my mother took her money and she ordered a great box of Bibles. They came by express. They were the most expensive kind, maps of the Holy Land and gilt-edged pages and the words of Christ were all marked in red. I

> was tramping all over the country at the age of eight, in boys' shoes and not owning a pair of mittens, giving away Bibles. (72)

Ada, as a woman who sells books in order to satisfy her own love for knowledge and support her family has a difficult time realizing why her mother would spend all her money on ordering fine Bibles. What she fails to understand is precisely what makes Della unable to explain her mother's eagerness in doing what she loves to do at the cost of her isolation and her daughter's embarrassment. While Ada's will stems from a sense of duty in providing for her family, her mother's motivation seems foreign to her. Religion, which Ada has tried to escape from in fear of becoming her mother, gave her mother a way to express her individuality and fulfill her wishes to go against what seems "appropriate" behavior for a caring mother in her community. While Ada judges her own mother for living a different life, which was difficult for her to understand, she adds a side note to the story, about her mother's life before marriage which can explain her mother's motives in doing so:

> She had passed her Entrance Exams and she wanted to go to High School, in Town. But her father said no, she was to stay home and keep house until she got married. […] after two years at home, miserable, learning some things on her own from old High School textbooks that had belonged to her mother (a schoolteacher herself before marriage and religion overtook her), she defied her father [and] walked a distance of nine miles to Town. (73)

As a teenage girl, Ada's mother refuses to accept her mother's destiny for herself and decides to run away from home and ends up at a boarding house in order to be able to continue her education. Her attempts at breaking the rules, however, are not completely

successful, since she ends up depressed and secluded from the community as Ada has a difficult time explaining to her daughter. Her mother's motives—just like her own—are lost in the sound and the fury of a community that cannot bear for women to embrace their individual interests and talents.

Towards the end of the story, however, Della's voice, as well as that of an aunt, seems to have merged with that of her mother's. Her mother has to give up her corresponding course, and go back to selling books, and the story ends with an unusual comment from the aunt: "One of my father's aunts—it never matters which—said, 'Now, she will miss her writing to the newspapers'" (86). This last remark could indicate not just a critique of Ada's way of life, but a degree of sympathy. A woman who was consistently critical of Ada—and could represent any other woman in that community—came to have a certain sympathy for Ada's unconventional choices.

Moreover, the aunt's unexpected sympathy could also suggest other women's, as well as Della's internal desire in choosing between what is viewed as acceptable in the community and the never-ending regret of not being who she truly is. Arendt points out that it is through "acting and speaking" that "men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" (179); most women in this story prefer to stay silent, passive and to conform to the social rules in order to be accepted members of their community. Their subconscious desire is to live a life like Ada's, but this desire never manifests itself because of their own faithful practices and unwavering rule-following. In Ahmed's words, "when a structural problem becomes diagnosed in terms of the will, then individuals become the problem: individuals become the cause of problems deemed their own"

(7). It is precisely in this flawed social structure that other women criticize the "problematic individual" and yet yearn to be like her, wishing they could dare to be the willful eccentric, by intentionally and "purposefully" challenging the norms and playing the social games differently.

2.3. Nowhere to Call Home: Studying Spaces of Non-Belonging in Daneshvar's *Savushun*

The female protagonist's relationship to her community is also foregrounded in Daneshvar's *Savushun.* In this novel, we are introduced to the character of Zari as a middle-aged woman, but we also learn, through her memories, about her life as a young girl. In this text, the female character needs to resist the dominant male-centered language games of her community to challenge the social structure she is in. The social structure depicted in this text is on the one hand a traditional male-centered community and a site of conflict for the traditional society's move towards Westernized modernization. Furthermore, Zari, as a representative of contemporary women, has to fight two battles—the conventional definitions of womanhood in her community, her present adulthood, and the colonizing forces in charge of the missionary school that she attended as a young girl.

Sav*ushun*'s events take place at the time Iran was struggling with the famine of the mid-twentieth century, which was caused by the British economic colonization of Iran as a supplying base for its troops during World War II[11]. This military occupation led to religious, ideological,

[11] The story depicts the Iranian society in the years 1941 and 1945. Iran had been occupied by the British and the Soviets, joined later (in 1945) by the Americans, because it sat astride the supply lines from India and the Middle East to the Soviet Union. The Allies considered the occupation necessary because they could not afford to allow the possibility of German activity in the area. Many influential Iranians were ready to collaborate with the Germans in order to counteract the suffocating dominance of British and Russian interests that had become a fact of life […]. "From 1941 to 1945 Iran was reduced to the most abject state of dependence of its modern history—while still

and intellectual influences on different institutions such as schools, hospitals, and consequently on people of different walks of life, all echoed in this novel. Different generations of Iranian readers of *Savushun* can relate to the characters' struggles. Brian Spooner points out, "[Iranian readers] feel immediate identity with the major characters, each of who [sic] struggles in their own day-to-day lives with the social and historical forces that gave prerevolutionary Iran its characteristic hopelessness and emerging desperation—so inadequately understood by outsiders" (1). Therefore, the novel encapsulates the political atmosphere of Iran in the years of 1941-45, when the social structure and position of women were in the process of transformation, and it does so through a woman's point of view.

The story is narrated by Zahra (Zari), the protagonist, a young woman raised in a working-class family, but educated mainly in the British schools of the time. Zari is married to Yusoph, a Khan—an outstanding ruling figure in charge of governing certain villages in Iran. Despite his belonging to the ruling classes of the society, he has strong critiques of the way Iranian government of the time is serving the British military and how the working classes' cultural norms and financial well-beings are directly influenced by them. While Yusoph voices his critiques and opinions at any opportunity, Zari, who has a hard time speaking her own concerns, experiences internal conflicts throughout the text.

The fact that Zari is the protagonist and the narrator of this story is significant in this study in that the community Zari is situated in and describes is a story told by Daneshvar. As the

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nominally retaining its own independent government under the young Shah. The occupying powers subordinated everything to the economic and political objectives of supplying the eastern front and winning the war, with disastrous results for Iran's small economy. The worst of the results was widespread famine, especially in 1942–1943, triggered by a poor harvest the previous year." (Spooner 4-6)

first major contemporary woman fiction writer in Iran, Daneshvar highlights the move of a society to modernity and the individuals' abilities in finding their own unique positions in it through Zari's perspective. As Maryam Mafi suggests, "this is the first time, in modern Persian literary prose, that the world is perceived through female eyes. The reader journeys with Zari from the limited sphere of her home and family to the harsher demands of a turbulent society, caught in the cross-fires of political exigencies" (92). Zari, as the focalizer of the text, engages different personal experiences as part of the larger socio-political crisis that is taking place in her country. Through her descriptions, readers learn about her contemporary society as well as how she grew up as a young girl attending Catholic school and struggling with similar conflicts as an adult in her crisis-stricken community.

The first scene of the novel depicts the wedding ceremony of the governor's daughter. Zari and her husband are invited since they belong to the upper social classes. Zari is deeply unhappy to see a luxurious present in the governor's house for the couple at a time when ordinary people can barely get their daily bread. While feeling strongly about this injustice, she does not communicate it to anyone, even to her husband, out of fear: "She felt sick to even look at the platters of cookies, and the fully-filled dishes of nuts, that were on the tables here and there. Just for a moment, it dawned on her that perhaps the first is sent as a gift from the confectioners' trade and the second by the nut shops' trade" (11). Just like her husband, she feels betrayed to see how the basic needs of working classes cannot be met while the ruling class acts so wasteful. Her internal conflict in the form of her inability to voice her concerns is intensified once the governor's family sends for her emerald earrings for their daughter's wedding. The governor's family ask to borrow Zari's earrings, which is in fact a

softened form of an order that she cannot deny for fear that her husband's status would be compromised. Zari, therefore, is not willing to part with the earrings since knows too well that "if hell froze over she would see her earrings again" (6). She knows demanding the earrings is the governor's way to exert power over her husband who is a political critic of the governor and his discriminatory policies; however, she has no way to resist and decides to stay silent, since she knows that denying the governor's wishes could jeopardize her husband's socio-political position.

Zari, as a woman who has been trained to practice her womanhood in a conventional way, has learnt to keep quiet in a community where she is not given a voice of her own. Yet, as a woman in this community, she feels the ever-increasing desire to speak up and to change the narratives that tend to define her, which leads to her identification with the underprivileged groups in the society. Her interest in and sympathy for underprivileged groups, such as inmates and mentally ill patients, is portrayed through her regular visits to prisons and asylums, actions that put her at risk of being associated with and becoming a social outcast.

Zari's silence is not merely caused by the fact that she is a woman in a male-centered community, but by the fact that her words and actions could be interpreted as resistance to the governor's family and by extension, the occupying forces. She "suffers from repeated containment of her free, natural [usual] self. In spite of the rather unusual element of free choice in her selection of a husband, she still cannot find the emotional intensity and spontaneity she desires in her relationship with him" (338). She is a woman who is in search of herself in the face of ongoing crises in her society and in her personal relationships; therefore, her resistance in complying with the unjust practices of the community gains more significance.

As an example of narratives of community, the text shows the invisible threads that run through characters' lives that direct and control them as individuals. As a young woman, Zari has come to the realization that knowing how to play social games, as seen in the example above, could secure her family's safety. In a way, Zari becomes the voice for the silent women in her community, despite having to hide all her emotions, desires, fears, and suffering.

Therefore, these emotions and thoughts, which are buried in the way she experiences the events of the story, make themselves known to the readers, which create an underlying complexity in the character. Regarding this complexity, Azar Nafisi, an Iranian literary scholar, writes:

> Daneshvar's presentation of Zari creates some uneasiness in the reader; it appears as if beneath the straight forward and explicit descriptions of Zari's innermost feelings there exists some deep emotion that has found no expression—as if some deep resentment wishes to surface and mock Zari's most sacred loyalties […]. [Daneshvar} simplified her heroine's real suffering - Zari's agony over having to choose between a husband she loves and an independence of mind she so desperately needs. (994)

While I agree with the existence of emotions that are felt between the lines but rarely expressed by Zari in the text, far from being a simplification of her suffering, Daneshvar chooses a practical way to represent the non-verbal and therefore unpresentable suffering of a woman in such conflicted social and familial structures. The "uneasiness" felt in her character is what makes it possible for her voice to be heard through the spaces left in the text and make this "least communicable experience" known to the readers.

By juxtaposing the past and the present struggles of Zari as a representative of the Iranian woman in the postwar era, Daneshvar creates a textual space that enables the reader—as another generation in their own situation—to find these points of departure. This space further enhances the understanding of the issues for Iranian women in the socio-political transition of the traditional Iranian social fabric to contemporary times, This function of the text could also be explained by Wolfgang Iser's Reception theory in that the text becomes a "meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook" (289). Thus, the text written with those gaps will be interpreted by readers' own historical consciousness and the image of the modern Iranian woman can be reimagined by different generations of readers.

Regarding the prevalence of gaps in the texts, Iser adds: "Even in the simplest story there is bound to be some kind of blockage, if only for the fact that no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism" (284). In addition to this quality of literary texts, I am arguing that the women writers in this study employ this technique for the reimagination of identities and social positions of the female characters in the literary texts and consequently of their contemporary readers. This way the text's reality becomes the reality of the reader on another level in that she sees herself capable of challenging institutions—formal or informal—as it appears in these texts. The contemporary reader can relate to these representations of women who tend to go mainly against informal institutions in attempts not only to challenge them, but to re-shape them in ways to find their own place inside them.

Daneshvar depicts Zari's ambiguous and at times hard to communicate feelings through the textual gaps that she creates. One source of conflict is religious institutions' conflicting influences on her, foreign Christian rules she has to observe, which originated in the Catholic school she attended as a young girl—established and run by British missionaries, and Islamic national rules and traditions that originated in her family and their ancestors. For instance, Yusoph, his second cousin, and Zari have a dispute over the identity of the hero seen in a painting, when Zari (having been educated in an English school) tries to explain it based on her biblical knowledge or Islamic teachings that came down to her from her family and the underlying Islamic structure of her society: "[Y]ou can't fool me, I bet that this is John the Baptist [...] now I get it, this is the executed head of Imam Hossein…and that is the horse…" (45). As Yusoph mocks her for her lack of knowledge, she embarrassingly corrects her guess with interpreting it as an Islamic sign, the martyrdom of Imam Hossein in the massacre of Ashoura[12]; Yusoph reacts to her comment as, "[F]orgive her; my wife has come to her husband's home straight out of school. Her head is still full of the Bible stories she had to read every morning at school." Yusoph stops her by saying that it is an image of "Siyavash," the Persian mythological hero of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh:* "don't embarrass me more than you have, dear, this is Siyavash[13]" (45). This example shows Zari's confusion over different sets of beliefs,

[12]The day that marks Imam Hossein's, a Shiite leader's, martyrdom as the last soldier and commander in chief of his small troop in their protest against the unjust yet powerful Islamic government of the time. The story around his fights and eventual martyrdom is thematically similar to the legend of Siyavash.

[13]Siyavash is a prince and the hero of a story from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh (Book of the Persian Kings)* who was accused of adulatory by his stepmother, Sudabeh, for not returning her love. Based on old Zoroastrian traditions that regarded fire holy, he was then sentenced to walk through fire in order to prove his innocence. The title of this novel, *Savushun,* is taken from this legend and a traditional regional mass held in his honour.

values and traditions based on the conflicting perceptions and teachings that were presented to her inside and outside the British convent school system as a child. The sense of shame that she feels, as a result of her inability to identify the character, is indicative of her feeling of "unhomeliness" in her national traditions as well as the religious or foreign narratives.

Zari is a representation of an individual in her divided community, which is influenced by values from Islamic/Persian traditions and beliefs and the imported value systems and beliefs of English forces, which I will call "home" and "foreign" language games, respectively. Home language games are the rules, norms, and practices that the female character has to follow and are validated by formal or informal institutions in her community. Foreign language games are the ones that are dictated to the character and she is expected to follow them while she feels no obligations to do so as they are not supported by the majority of other members of the community either. While the character has to follow certain language games in order to be recognized as a member of each community, it is often the foreign language games she consciously rejects or is unwilling to follow, since she is introduced to them in the context of the school and does not feel any affinity with them.

Zari feels stuck between two different games that she has learnt to play, but neither of which can fulfill her as an individual who needs to have a voice of her own. While home language games tell her to act as a traditional woman, keep silent, and be a good wife who needs to protect her family, foreign language games have trained her to be obedient, give up resistance, and conform to the dictated religious values and norms. What the two language games share is their emphasis on following the rules and confining the individual in order to deny her the ability to create personal narratives.

Any deviation from the rules results in punitive actions on the part of the ones responsible for establishing and reinforcing the rules. For instance, throughout the text, Zari reviews the events of the past regarding the tension she feels between different sets of rules and norms to which she has had to conform. These experiences mostly go back to her school days and the way she was always caught up in the space between the missionaries at school and her traditional and religious upbringing at home. For instance, she remembers the time when the school headmistress had forcefully made one of her classmates, Mehri, break her fast, as an Islamic practice that according to the headmistress's language games is meaningless to the school authorities:

> The headmistress pushed Mehri down to the classroom floor, sat by her head, opened her mouth with her hands, put a finger in her mouth and tried to pour water down her throat. Mehri bit the headmistress's hand and the headmistress shouted angrily, “you miserable wretch!" Then Mehri sat up and said, "The filthy hand of you, an infidel, touched my mouth, so my fast is automatically broken. Give me the water and I’ll drink it all. You will be responsible for the sin.” (134)

Mehri has no alternative but to give in to the headmistress's forceful action. Although the girls try to resist the school authorities and make their voices heard, they cannot change the dominant discourse of the foreign language games they are supposed to learn and observe. The protesting voice is silenced when nearly all students leave Mehri where she has fallen until sunset in accordance with the headmistress's order. Zari is the only one who stays and helps Mehri, who keeps crying: "There's only two or three hours before the time to break the fast. I've observed the fast for twelve days. I even started two days earlier as a sign of welcoming

[Ramadan]. I had decided to fast all the thirty days of this holy month" (135). Mehri's willfulness is spoken through her talking back to the headmistress and telling her that it was not because of her interference that her fast is broken but that it is the headmistress's *foreign* beliefs that have undone Mehri's practice. In other words, "If authority assumes the right to turn a wish into a command, then willfulness is a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given" (Ahmed 1). This is, therefore, an act of disobedience that enables Mehri to challenge the school. By complying with another set of language games, in this case practicing a religious act, Mehri is able to resist the school's authority and position herself as a willful outsider. Thus, an important distinction between the home and foreign language games is that while the character has to comply with both to be accepted as a member in the community, she would often choose the one with which she feels more affinity. This implies the inevitability of engaging with a set of language games while the character's agency manifests itself through being able to choose how she wants and needs to play the game.

As a student in this Catholic school, Mehri is prohibited from observing any rules that are not recognized by the school authorities. Thus, when she is found to be fasting, she is immediately confronted by a school authority and forced to "undo" her rule-following from another religious institution, as opposed to the rules imposed by school authorities. Moreover, the emphasis of the headmistress that other students leave Mehri alone is her understanding of the significant role of her peers, as her immediate community, in validating her "wrongdoing." By challenging the rules of her school, which is run by foreign set of language games, Mehri is resisting the dominant narratives of her community. She insists on holding her fast, as a Muslim practitioner, in a setting that rejects any other value system but their interpretation and

execution of Christianity. In this context, Mehri has to face the consequences of breaking the rules of her school, as a willful subject who "[refuses] to become part" (Ahmed 134) of a community where her agency to choose her practice is not recognized and is sought to be eradicated.

While Zari shows resistance by staying with Mehri when instructed to leave her, Mehri continues her protest by articulating her painful experience. By voluntarily joining in her friend's situation, Zari becomes another voice of resistance. Similarly, in her own confrontation with the school headmistress, Zari's ongoing struggles with the missionaries communicates her frustration and willfulness in rejecting the school's rules with which she does not wish to identify. Moreover, by uniting with Mehri and supporting her position of resistance, Zari is able to sympathize with Mehri and feel that they have similar ambitions for resisting the school's imposed set of rules.

Another instance that shows Zari's willfulness in resisting the school's narratives occurs when she has to confront the headmistress for wearing black mourning clothes after her father's death, as is a cultural practice. The headmistress orders her to change her blouse for welcoming the arrival of the British visitors, but she refuses:

> The headmistress sent the girls home and said that she wanted all of them to return to school by that afternoon, neat, clean and dressed up, and to make sure to put on their clean, pressed white blouses. Zari's father had just recently died, so out of respect for her father's death she wore a black blouse under her black and white plaid school uniform. All the girls who were in mourning did the same. It was not forbidden anyway.

> Now, where the hell would Zari find a white blouse in the two or three hours she had, and with what money? (154)

Apart from her financial inability to buy a new blouse, her resistance becomes a political act to confront the headmistress's order. She can neither afford a new blouse nor does she wish to wear one as it would be an act of disrespect to don white so soon after her father's death. Zari appears in school in the same black blouse: "[B]ut that day, Zari risked it. She washed the same black blouse, ironed it, and went to school, thinking, she can't kill me, anyway. As soon as the headmistress's eyes fell on her, she was so beside herself that she wanted to beat her" (154). By not doing what she was told to do and putting on the back blouse again, Zari shows her willfulness to stand against the imposed rules.

However, just when Zari seems to have succeeded at last as the headmistress seems to have no choice but to accept her because of her important role in the welcoming group to the foreign school visitors, the headmistress pulls up her last trick and publicly shames Zari, "She calmed down and said, 'What a pity. Your English is better than that of all the other students. I want you to welcome them in English and recite the poem 'If' by Kipling. Otherwise, I would expel you from school. Am I going to regret exempting you from tuition?'" (154). The headmistress's last strike is to turn the other girls against her and shame Zari in front of her classmates for not having enough money to afford the school tuition. The headmistress uses her power to make her conscious of her family's inferior economic status in order to make her conform.

It is only after this critical moment that Zari feels she has exhausted all her willfulness and has nothing more to fight for and finally gives in as the headmistress undresses her herself:

“The headmistress took the matter into her own hands. In front of all the students, she carefully removed Zari’s plaid uniform, but when she got to the black blouse, she pulled it so hard that she tore off a sleeve. Then, careful again, she put the white blouse on her” (155). While Zari’s attempt to not follow the rules is not successful, she is physically forced to follow what the headmistress wants; nevertheless, her resistance makes the headmistress feel “frustrated” while she desperately tries to “fix” Zari. However, when her multiple attempts to challenge the rules fail, Zari receives a confirmation of the need to be silent and obedient to be accepted by her community. Once again, it is in following the foreign language games that she can be an insider of the community.

Moreover, the moment Zari thinks that she has lost the support of her peers, she seems to have lost all sense of belonging, which in turn leads to her surrendering to the will of the headmistress. She has no alternative but to give up her will to continue wearing the black shirt in order to practice mourning for her father's death. By not conforming to the school's rules, she becomes an outsider of the schools’ language games as an official community she is part of, where she is constantly identified as a deviator and trouble-maker. However, her loss of a sense of belonging does not end here: she is publicly shamed in front of her classmates—this time not merely because of being a non-conformist but for not having enough money to attend the school.

The headmistress’s last strike is to disarm her, not as a mere warning or a punishment, but by baring her off from her sense of solidarity with the other players of the home languages games. By embarrassing her in front of her classmates, the headmistress is able to target her safety net that is her home language games. Zari and the other girls have been able to

challenge the school's language games by practising the Iranian and Islamic cultural language games. Once there is no longer a set of language games or a sense of community Zari could fall back on, she seems to lose her will to resist, since she cannot make up her story without having access to a set of language games.

This confrontation is not the end of Zari's willfulness, however. Willfulness, as Ahmed points out, "involves persistence in the face of having been brought down, where simply to keep going or 'to keep coming up' is to be stubborn and obstinate" (2). Zari's persistence in following the path she believes is right makes her a willful character. These flashbacks from her youth are paralleled by the descriptions of Zari's social position as a mother. In her present situation, Zari, as a young mother, has learnt to tame her willfulness in order to protect her family. Yushoph, as a socialist political leader, cannot tolerate the injustices done to the lower social classes and constantly protests the will of the governor and the totalitarian regime, putting himself and his family in danger. As a result of this, Zari constantly fears losing her family and watches her own moves and keeps silent so as not to worsen the situation, until the end of the novel when her son and husband's lives are threatened by the government.

Her son's favourite horse is captured by the governor, which causes him and Yusoph to protest. When she feels that her teenage son's life is in danger she gives up her silence once again. Zari tries to hide all her fears but gives the act up when she realizes that her husband and son not only do not recognize her role in maintaining her silence for protecting her family, but that they have also turned against her. Her son accuses her of being afraid, and she responds:

> "No, let him say it," Zari said. "He means a jackass like me. Now do you father and son want to hear the truth? Then listen. Do you remember the wedding day of the

> Governor's daughter? They came and borrowed my emerald earrings and they didn't give them back, no matter how long I waited […] I knew that eventually we had to stand up to them. But I got scared. Yes, scared. I got scared of the gendarme who came for the horse." (129)

For the first time in a long time, Zari finally breaks her silence. She admits her fears in the face of her will to stand up to the authorities. She is able to express how she feels, something that she had been trained not to do through the home and foreign language games she had been exposed to all her life. She contemplates her choice of being fearful of the way the system sacrifices its own subjects but holds her husband responsible for her fears: "All she was thinking about was if she had been fearful or she had become one. And if Yusoph is really guilty" (133). For the first time in the text, Zari decides to confront her husband. She stops holding back and breaks her silence, merging with the willful young girl she used to be. She realizes that the source of her suffering has not only been the unjust authorities, but her husband's ignorance of her role in their relationship as well. Her act of breaking the silence becomes a willful act when standing up to a figure of authority is dubbed as going against the stream and not following rules in neither home nor foreign language games.

Zari experiences the satisfaction in acting willfully and standing her ground but comes to realize that she will pay a price for her actions: "In her heart, Zari was happy that she has stood tall in any way [sic]" (181). Similar to her experiences of willfulness when she was a student at the missionary school, however, her feeling is transient, since both sets of language games—that of her school and the one supported by the totalitarian government of the time—do not tolerate resistance from individuals. At the end of the novel when Yusoph's resistance leads to

his being murdered by the governmental forces, Zari realizes that she is unable to change the system and remembers Yusoph's words: "what is the use of all this charitable work? The whole thing is rotten from the core'" (111). However, the ending of the novel suggests a major change in her character and that she cannot and will not go back to silence.

What Yusoph means by "making the system right" is to change the official governmental institutions to be more inclusive and treat all social classes equally. Zari comes to realize that the socio-political system is not to become "right" at any other price than the actions and at times, the sacrifice of individual lives of her generation, including that of her husband. *Savushun* is the story of the spaces in history that are never to be filled up completely to form one perfect whole, and each generation tries to fill in these gaps, clearing out the conflicts. However, they cannot succeed at once. The ability to affect the social structure would mean individuals inevitably being affected by it. Zari realizes that there are socio-political institutions that not only she, but any other ordinary person is incapable of "fixing" in their community; despite her devastation, Yusoph's being shot in a conflict with the government forces her to rise up and opens up a new space for her to act right in a community where once "no matter how hard she thought, she didn't know what she could do to fix things" (111). Zari, as the protagonist, representing the social transformation of women's position in Iran's socio-political atmosphere of the time, sees no choice but to assert her will and speak up to challenge the injustices done in her community. Her decision to break her silence and face her fears once and for all is emblematic of the necessity of individual action for any social change to happen.

Similarly, the last piece that she seems to contemplate is the condoling words of MacMuhan, an Irish storyteller and a family friend, who, in offering his condolences to

her, advises her: “Do not weep, sister. In your home, a tree shall grow, and others in your city and many more throughout your country. And the wind shall carry the message from tree to tree and the trees shall ask the wind, ‘Did you see the dawn on your way[14]?’" (181). These last words by which the novel ends give a sense of hope and possibility for this community to change based on every character’s will to go against injustice and revive their social structure. “Wind” and “dawn”, in the last part of the letter, could be metaphors of the socio-political changes that many Iranian contemporary writers[4] hoped to come about in their community’s struggles with reimagining a new identity in the face of imposed Westernization and consequent attempts of some to revert to traditional ways. Furthermore, Zari’s decision to break her silence and speak her mind is emblematic of Daneshvar’s vision for the modern Iranian woman to claim her position in the community and in doing so push for more social changes.

2.4. The Witch Is in: Social Institutions on Trial in Murdoch’s *The Bell*

The confrontation of the female character and her community is also at the centre of Iris Murdoch’s *The Bell.* It is the story of Dora, a former art student, who has recently left her controlling husband, Paul. The novel starts with her decision to go back to her husband, who is working on a historical project, and visit him at Imber, a small Anglican community in England. Once she arrives at Imber, Dora faces many difficulties while she tries to cope with new rules and language games of this religious community. As members of the community try hard to make her change her “out of order” behaviour, she tries to escape their narratives and

[14]This line is reminiscent of the famous line from Daneshvar’s contemporary Persian poet, Nima Yushij’s famous poem “Daarvag”: “O Daarvag (i.e. hyla)/ messenger of cloudy day/when will the rain start?” (my translation), which shows the speaker’s anticipation of and hopes for social change in his contemporary society.

find an alternative way to define her own individual identity. While she encounters other characters in the abbey who are also struggling with their predefined positions in the community, she is joined by another newcomer, Toby, on her way to challenge the language games of this community,

Imber, as a community representing a religious institution, manifests itself by the other characters' close adherence to its rules and communication of them to others. As Bran Nicol suggests, "like all communities and institutions, Imber sustains itself by continually invoking tradition. This is shown directly by the puritanical Mrs. Mark's directions to Dora, when she tells her about the rituals that must be observed at Imber […] and informing her of its historical features" (55-56). While these rules are essential to the existence and maintaining of the community and have turned into norms for the members, constant ritualistic practice and reminders still seems to be necessary in order to instruct the new members. The community members are in fact like the players of the game who know how to play and need to teach the rules to others as well.

The necessity of rule-following in a community is emphasized by David Bloor regarding Wittgenstein's language games in a community: "[A]n interesting feature of this 'must' deserves special notice. If a rule of the kind we have just considered tells us we must do a certain thing, it is clear we are not being imposed on any physical necessity which forces us to do it. Rather we must do the thing in question if we are to conduct ourselves rightly" (2). Thus, the members' following the rules give them a sense of privilege in being "right" and rightful members of the community. This advantage grants them the right to determine who is doing right or wrong and to try to correct their actions so that they conform. While their

religious affiliation gives them a formal sense of belonging to an institution, members' personal interpretation and execution of these rules can make the game more ambivalent, and prone to change.

In other words, the execution of rules and practice of this institution seem very important to the senior members of this institution who do their best to instruct and convince new comers to observe their rules. However, Dora is unwilling to do this. From the very beginning, it is clear that not only does Dora not believe in the religious practices present at Imber, she also feels estranged by them. For instance, from Dora's point of view during her first day at Imber, she sees nuns of the community as "a shapeless pile of squatting black cloth," which is not so pleasant a description, and a rather biased one. Therefore, when on this first day, she is taken to a church where everyone is kneeling and praying and is instructed by the nun and others that she needs to cover her hair, she decides to walk out after a few moments in a state of frustration.

Mrs. Mark, is a senior member of the community who has abandoned her worldly life, has committed herself to supporting Imber, and who is in charge of maintaining these rules and introducing them to Dora. Once Dora arrives in the community, Mrs. Mark decides to tell Dora about the significance of these religious rules that they tend to follow. For instance, when she sees some picked flowers in the room Dora is assigned, she disapproves and comments that "we never have flowers in the house [...]. We keep everything here as plain as possible. It's a little austerity we practise [...]. You see, we don't normally allow any sort of personal decoration in the rooms...you will soon get used to our little ways [...]. Paul has fitted in so well" (60-61). Dora's attempt to express her individuality in keeping flowers in her room is strongly

rejected by Mrs. Mark as a sign of disrupting the rules. In other words, Mrs. Mark finds the introduction of different norms and practices threatening to the institution lest the nature of the game, that is, the integrity of the institution, be affected. In other words, the character's willfulness as represented by Dora's keeping flowers in her private room is condemned and she is instructed to make her life choices in accordance with the abbey's rules.

Moreover, the fact that Mrs. Mark confidently believes that Dora will change her behaviour is indicative not only of the power of these rules on other characters, such as Dora's husband, to become members of the community, but also the importance of community as an important instructional setting. By bringing Paul into the equation, Mrs. Mark is trying to validate these narratives and justify their applicability to new comers in pointing out the changes in character that she believes she has observed in Dora's husband.
This attempt is unsuccessful, since Dora will not be influenced by Mrs. Mark.

Regarding the instructional function of communities, Bloor suggests: "[W]e go on from our training in the way we do because we have a set of dispositions and tendencies that happen to be activated in this way by the examples used in training. It is not a kind of insight or 'seeing' i.e. seeing what the examples 'mean', that lies at the bottom of the language game, it is a way of acting" (14). It is precisely this "way of acting" and establishing the norm that is at the heart of rule-following. It is through imitating examples and others' training, correcting, and rewarding these practices that language games function in a community.

Consequently, it is not only Mrs. Mark who is keen on following the rules. Mrs. Strafford too gently reprimands Dora about inquiring into the past lives of other community members. Mrs. Strafford reminds her that "we never discuss our past lives here. That's another

little religious rule that we try to follow. No gossip [...] curiosity that is idle soon degenerates into malice" (63). While these are rules of the convent, the narratives she adds to explain them are not. This narrative, therefore, helps Mrs. Strafford to legitimize her belief, which is also supposedly supported by the mainstream community members and religious narratives.

Gradually, the rules are introduced to Dora, and make her more and more conscious of the discrepancies between her personal world and the world as constructed and experienced at Imber. This gap is particularly large in terms of the ways that women's roles in the community are understood. Mrs. Mark introduces these gendered norms to Dora: "We believe that women should stick to their traditional tasks. No point in making a change just to make a change, is there?" (71) She seems convinced of her beliefs to an extent that she does not think a change is possible or even necessary. "Traditional tasks" are clearly defined for her and the people involved in the abbey, since they tend to follow them with religious austerity, and what a woman like Dora could be capable of and useful for, is to be "handy with [her] needle" (71).

For Dora, as an outsider, none of the religious rules and narratives makes sense. She does not understand why the nuns decide to be enclosed in the abbey and have no communications with the outside world. For example, when Mrs. Mark takes her to meet Catherine, who is preparing to join the Abbey, Dora has a difficult time accepting that she is willing to join the convent: "Dora turned to take one last look at the figure under the net. Once she hears the news, "she felt a horrified surprise, a curious sort of relief, and a more obscure pain, compounded perhaps of pity and of some terror, as if something within herself were menaced with destruction" (72-3). The adjectives that are associated with Dora's reaction, such

as “pity and terror” show her cathartic experience in learning about what she finds a tragic fate for another woman like herself.

Communities impose their authority over subjects in social and cultural disciplining of individuals through laws, institutions and narratives. Although laws are directly made by formal institutions in a community, and some institutions are formed and supported by the authorities, the practitioners who maintain the traditions are individuals themselves and can make their own informal institutions. Narratives and myths have their roots in political, religious, or social rules, while it is often the people who reshape, strengthen or weaken their power. As Bloor also suggests, “making a step in following a rule counts as a ‘right’ step, i.e. a genuine and successful piece of rule-following, if it is aligned with the steps everyone else, or nearly everyone else, makes” (15-16). Thus, the disciplining of self and others by community members plays a significant role in validating language games and narratives as the same means through which individuals gain the agency to define their identities. Whereas the social narratives tend to define individuals, and categorize them based on their sex, religion, social class or gender roles, there are still many who do not fit in them and are treated as outcasts in communities. It is through the study of the outsiders’ strategies to go against these norms that we can see the arbitrariness of these narratives and the individual’s power and agency to make her own narratives.

Paul, seen as the converted new comer, is the reason Dora takes up a challenge to create her own narrative as opposed to the community’s tendency to make her follow the predefined path. Paul recounts to Dora the story behind the abbey and the curse that fell upon it in hope of

perhaps making Dora conscious of her own "sins," which was abandoning her husband and living with another man before she decided to come back to him. Paul tells the following:

> There is a legend about the Abbey bell—I found it in one of the manuscripts. It should appeal to you […]. Sometime in the fourteenth century, that was before the dissolution, the story runs that one of the nuns had a lover [...]. The Bishop, who was an especially holy and spiritual man, also demanded that the guilty one should confess. When there was still no response he put a curse on the Abbey, and as the chronicler puts it, the great bell "flew like a bird out of the tower and fell into the lake […]. The guilty nun was so overwhelmed by this demonstration that she forthwith ran out of the abbey gates and drowned herself in the lake. (42)

In-line with the title of the novel and the role this narrative plays in the novel, this is a central narrative introduced to the text, which encompasses a few instructional language games. The protagonist is a young woman who had taken a lover, breaking the religious rule of abstinence. The nun, however, breaks her vow of celibacy and is not willing to confess her sin to the Bishop—the figure of authority. What happens next in the story is the recounting of a historic detail--the fall of the old bell—as directly linked to the nun's nonconformity. As a narrative meant to instruct new comers about the accepted norms and the necessity to maintain them, the breaking of rules leads to the nun's downfall. Paul is using this narrative to influence Dora so that she does not follow in the nun's footsteps and scare her from the consequences of her actions. In order to make Dora identify with the nun in the story and make her more self-conscious, Paul also adds: "You of course identify yourself with the faithless one" (42). When she questions the veracity of the story, he assures Dora that all stories or "legends

usually have some truth behind them" (42). Paul's use of the religious story, while different in presenting the breaking of celibacy and wedding vows, shows the power of the dominant language games in community's creation of narratives that make individuals conform to the rules.

However, what Paul fails to understand is that Dora does not relate to the narratives the same way as would a person with a religious background. Paul seems to not recognize the possibility of any individual identity for Dora; however, Dora feels the need to know about Paul's beliefs in order to shape a clearer idea of him as a person and her husband: "She must remember to ask him, some time when he was in a good temper, whether he believed in God. It was absurd not to know" (42). This statement shows the contrast between their ways of thinking and the fact that their identities had never found a way in their marriage. Paul, in telling the story, tries to indirectly criticize her actions, in making her fulfill her predefined role in the narrative and conform to the rules of the community; however, contrary to his expectation, Dora's identification with the disobedient nun takes a very different challenging turn in the text and helps create her new subject position.

Not making sense of the rules gives Dora the position of an outsider in the community. The new comer, Toby, is the only one in the community who shares Dora's position and is the one who discovers the old bell from the story. Dora's only way to define her function as an individual in this community is to disrupt the whole: "Dora who felt no doubts either about Toby's story or about the identity of the object was suddenly filled with the uneasy elation of one to whom great power has been given which he does not yet know how to use" (197). She recognizes what Toby describes to her as the bell of the story Paul told her about and

feels empowered by the knowledge she now possesses. Finding out about the bell gives her an upper hand in that she knows more than the members of the community know. She ironically recalls a sermon she has heard in the abbey and plans to "surprise" the community in a way to trick them with her secret knowledge and challenge the rules within this community. Therefore, "in this holy community she would play the witch" (199): since she is not capable of identifying herself with the true practitioners, it is only through taking the position of an outsider that she is able to show the emptiness of the bell as a signifier. The new comers, Dora and Toby, ironically become the ones to bring the old bell out, the symbol of the abbey's existence and its senior members' faith in the narrative for which it stood.

To Dora, as the outsider to the community, finding the bell and taking it out represents her ability to subvert the dominant narratives in a community that does not recognize her right to be who she is. She fully takes on the role of an outsider and is "willing to announce [her] disagreement, and to put [herself] behind it" (Ahmed 134). Thus, Dora identifies with the role of a witch in this religious community, which makes this text "as [an exercise] in subversive mimesis," as Sabina Lovibond argues. Like the women in past generations who were driven to the margins, as a result of having been denied any power throughout history (see Federici), Dora can only assert herself through positioning herself as the outsider and her going against the homogenizing narratives that fail to recognize her individuality.

However, the moment this shift happens, the abbey can no longer keep its stability. The characters who had been struggling with their defined roles and positions in the community seem to lose their adherence to the dominant narratives of the community. Once a metanarrative is subverted and emptied of its significance, the community loses its integrity

and individuals lose their predefined identities. Since the abbey is structured around the story about the old bell, finding the bell is supposed to strengthen its members' faith; instead, what happens is that the master narrative also has the power to dismantle the community: the mystic signification of the bell disappears once the signifier is identified. In other words, it is the idea around it, the name, and the narrative– not the actual object that matters—which also suggests the possibility of change in the community's structure.

Towards the end of the novel, other members of the abbey, such as Catherine and Michael, get to question the rules of the institutions and their decisions to be permanent members of this community; however, as outsiders and new comers, Dora and Toby can go against the institution's rules without facing any serious consequences. Moreover, it is finally Dora's curiosity and determination in exposing the "truth" in Paul's story that provides the space for others in the community to question their loyalty to the community's boundaries.

Dora's perseverance results in not only being left on her own by the community but makes other characters question the institutional narratives they have taken for granted, so that their discovery shakes the moral cohesiveness of the community. Michael, another member of the community and a preacher who is struggling with his own role in the community, recognizes a similar tendency in Dora and refuses to force her into repentance. "He refuses to press Dora to rejoin Paul immediately because he feels that there is no need to urge her into "a machine of sin and repentance which was alien to her nature. [Paul] leaves Dora free to do what he himself must do—repent and be saved in an individual fashion" (329). Paul accepts Dora as she really is and concludes that "in the case of Dora too, that there was little point in forcing her willy-nilly into a machine of sin and repentance which was alien to her

nature. Perhaps Dora would repent after her own fashion; perhaps she would be saved after her own fashion" (Murdoch 303). Paul, as a member of the community and Dora's estranged husband, gives up attempting to define who she should be. He no longer has any input into how Dora reimagines her own identity.

Dora establishes an identity for herself in a community where she was expected to follow the rules and conform to her prescribed roles. She does not give in to the narratives, but instead builds on them to gain her agency. The way for Dora to do this, however, is through her resistance to conform to the abbey's rules. By not following the rules, she is able to change the game: she accepts her role as the outsider of the community and reimagines her identity as the nonconformist. It is through this re-identification that she is able to set an example for the community and make other members question their own position within the abbey and the very being of the community.

2.5. Outsiders De-stabilizing Social Structures in Narratives of Community

The texts in this chapter, as instances of narratives of community, depict different social structures and have at least one central female character who challenges the social order in which she finds herself. In each text, the non-conformist female character is positioned in a gendered institution or is surrounded by a community that expects her to conform to the rules and social frameworks while in most cases these rules are fashioned and monitored by other characters as well. As seen in different case studies, while being affected by different social structures and rules, there are shared social structures in these texts, which predefine the position of the female character in her community. To highlight these structures, the authors

depict the female character's daily struggles to break free from the imposed social rules and practice her own desired identity.

Moreover, while female characters in each text are surrounded by dominant language games that tend to define their roles and positions as women, they show different degrees of agency in dealing with these narratives. These dominant language games, as discussed earlier in this chapter, are made in two main ways: through making these narratives and social practices of formal and informal institutions. While formal institutions act as metanarratives—defining and giving direction to other narratives—major regulators of individuals' behaviours, avid practitioners and enforcers of the rules form and maintain informal institutions within their communities. Thus, characters' tendency to cope with or break away from the restrictions created by the dominant language games depends on their positions and their engagement with the social institutions with which they are dealing. Therefore, the central characters in the case studies offered in this chapter show different attitudes based on their position within their communities.

The analysis of narratives of community in this chapter identifies examples of both formal and informal institutions. While in each case study a specific kind of formal institution such as a religious community is present in the text, informal institutions exist in the form of others' maintaining the social norms associated with these institutions. In fact, whereas formal institutions are often expected to play the lead in directing individuals into their specific positions in the community, these narratives of community foreground informal institutions or the members of the community as the major determinants which carry out and enforce the homogenizing narratives, rewarding the conformists and punishing the deviants. Consequently,

with the foregrounded role of other characters in the community in establishing and maintaining these informal institutions, their significant role in challenging and changing these social structures is foreseeable, and in most cases, visible.

Community members, and in this study, female characters take centre stage in supporting and ensuring that rules of their specific institutions are followed through; at the same time, it is women who subvert these rules and destabilize institutions. As a result of their close rule-following, they gain social advantages such as a sense of belonging and pre-established social positions, while the ones who resist their narratives become outsiders. Not only do these outsiders lose their sense of belonging to a group of people and are denied the chance of equal interaction with others, they are also often demonized, and rejected by the mainstream institutions.

As seen in the second case study, *Savushun* illustrates the female characters' struggles to define her identity in the face of different discriminatory social structures in place. While part of the text deals with Zari's experiences as a young girl in a missionary school, the overall text highlights her struggles in dealing with both domestic and foreign language games (the religious language games with which she feels more of an affinity and the ones forced and practiced by the school, respectively), she has to play to be accepted as a member of her community. On the one hand Zari is representative of women who are torn amid the power plays of the war and suffer confusion on different ideological fronts. On the other hand, she is the representative of contemporary women who are caught up between finding their voice in their community and fitting in the gendered institutions—formal and informal.

Zari's memories of her school experiences highlight her struggles to go against the imposed narratives of the school authorities, while as an adult she faces more serious and demanding choices. Once she finds out that her silence and caution in dealing with socio-political issues cannot save those she cares for, she decides to break her silence. It is an act that could be symbolic of her determination in fighting injustice in her society, to become who she wants to be and abandon fear, and is possible only after her husband is murdered and her son's life is threatened. The loss she experiences awakens her to the realities of her community and to her role in believing and practicing her individuality.

In the case of “Princess Ida,” the central conflict of the text between Della and her mother turns into a *mise en abyme* of generations of women to have experienced internal conflicts as a result of their discriminatory social structures regarding women trying to educate themselves and others. Della's mother, just like women before her, who felt alienated in a patriarchal community, has earned her "eccentric" identity. Her socially-unrecognized existence that revolts others around her, including her own daughter, has given her a social position she could not gain in any other way. In fact, her eccentricity and being socially abandoned is the price she has had to pay to have a life in which she can practice her individuality.

While Ada's daughter, as well as others, tend to question her acts and dissociate her life from hers, the text suggests her evolving deep-down desire to share her mother’s courage to be who she wants to be. While the other women in the story have chosen to let go of their desired selfhoods, they have done so in order to abide by the social rules and to be accepted as worthy members of their communities. However, what happens in Ada's community is also

comparable to the other two stories in that the language games Ada refuses to practice are not established by a formal institution but are other characters' informal interpretation and practice, which leads them to label anyone who deviates from their own practice as an outcast. While patriarchal formal institutions are responsible for making social structures in ways to discriminate against women, informal institutions, as the community's practices, beliefs and behaviours are often the main reasons for non-conformist women being categorized as outsiders.

Another outsider's story is seen in *The Bell*, where Dora's insistence on living and practicing her unique individual identity despite other member's enforcement of the rules is what turns into a determining factor for the survival of the abbey. The community, in this case the religious institution, gains its power from the members' practice and enforcement of its language games, where any deviation from these rules can threaten its very structure. Dora, therefore, takes the normative narratives of the community, challenges their validity and is able to create a social space where she can be herself. Thus, she takes up the role of the outsider, as the only role available to her in this community and brings about the downfall of this institution using its central narrative of the old bell.

Dora's reimagining of herself as an outsider of this community, therefore, goes beyond her individual resistance and has much more dire consequences for the abbey itself. Similar to Zari's position in challenging the school's dominant narratives in *Savushun*, Dora's resistance to abide by the rules leads long-term members of the community to question its rules and eventually deconstructs the institution itself. While the community can survive with a few members not following its rules by labelling them as outsiders or disrupters of the system, it

can no longer do so once the acts of resistance reveal the underlying and ever-shifting set of narratives that prop up the dominant structure.

Thus, rejected or neglected by their communities, female protagonists of these texts, often pose their own narratives against their communities' mainstream, and find an identity of their own, even if temporarily. Whether positioned in their communities by formal or informal institutions, these characters use the very language games that tend to limit them to write back to their communities and challenge the validity and/or authority of the institutions. As outsiders who have been exposed to the rules for part or all of their lives, these characters know their communities' language games and how to play them, while what sets them free is their knowledge of how to disrupt, challenge, and/or change the rules of the games.

The presence of others as a significant feature of narratives of community in these texts is necessary for two reasons: one, to make the individual's actions right or wrong against a backdrop of social narratives. This is because the rules and its followers determine the structure of the game, who are the same rule-followers maintaining the social structure as it should be. These authority figures are the ones in charge of monitoring "problematic individuals" (Ahmed) and make sure they either conform to the master narratives or are labeled as outsiders. The other reason for the necessity of the others in the game is their judgment of the actions of one another. In other words, in Wittgenstein's view, the training, rewarding, or punitive roles of individuals in establishing the rules, teaching and maintaining them is also essential in determining each individual's validity of actions.

Therefore, what can influence individuals' rule-following, is the role of others in following and ensuring that everyone is following specific sets of rules. As Arendt observes,

"[n]o human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings" (22). Thus, human beings are conditioned by what Arendt calls "plurality" and are directly influenced by life and actions of others. In other words, the glue that binds human beings together is the concept of community and belonging through which “we are only compelled by rules in so far as we, collectively, complete one another” (22). Although institutions are fashioned to homogenize human action by offering individuals a sense of belonging, once the individual resists following a specific narrative, we could deduce, a space opens up for the rule to be replaced and the institution to be deconstructed and re-constituted.

What homogenizing communities take for granted is the individual's conformity to the rules and narratives they value, which is subject to the individual's acts or lack of action for that matter. As Bloor points out, "rules and meanings considered in themselves do not possess any agency: all agency and action associated with them derives from their human users and creators" (22). Individuals, then, are able to give or deny a rule its meaning by either following, advocating, or going against it, and contrary to what communities strive for, conformity and rule-following are not the only options for individuals when they are not willing to do so.

This idea of the significance of individual will in the way they act in social structures (also discussed by Sara Ahmed [2014] is in line with Arendt's idea that "action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it, and only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others" (22-23). What Arendt emphasizes here is the fact that in the absence of others, no action—be it rule-following, or rule-breaking—would become meaningless, thereby emphasizing the role of others in the dynamics of an individual’s

relationship to her community. Through their willfulness to act and their refusal to be passive, these female characters challenge the social discriminations they are subjected to and change their community's status quo.

Thus, through their willfulness, these characters constantly challenge the naturalized yet discriminatory social structures in their communities, so that they are able to rewrite the social narratives of their communities. It is due to their different and eccentric ways of being in the world that they create "a patchwork of little narratives" (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition)* in the homogenous metanarrative of their communities and contribute to a major change in the social structures. The spaces they create through their stories consequently pave the way for more acts of defiance, which in these case studies lead not only to a redefining of themselves but a reimagination of more diverse social structures.

Wittgenstein sees language games as capable of creating worlds when he states "*[t]he limits of my language* mean the limit of my world" (5.6). What Wittgenstein is implying is that by changing the way an individual uses language or employs language games, she could change her world as well. Peg O'Connor in her "Moving to New Boroughs: Transforming the World by Inventing Language Games" suggests, "[ru]les do not compel us nor leave no choice about how to act" (442), so that individuals always have the choice of either following or breaking them. Therefore, "[l]anguage games are not fixed, and new ones come into existence while other [Sic] become obsolete and forgotten" (Wittgenstein 23). The fact that individuals are able to change any set of language games and their ability to form narratives and stories makes individual resistance a political act to change the rules of the game, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: (Re)presenting Women's Identity through Storytelling

As discussed in the previous chapter, individuals in communities are often surrounded by two main forms of institutions: formal and informal. Whereas formal institutions affect individuals' lives by their established rules and language games in the community, others' adherence and enforcement of rules also influence the identity formation of the central characters in these works of fiction. While everyone in a community is exposed to some form of formal social rules, how the majority of individuals are conditioned to act and maintain the accepted practise of language games determines the direction a community itself takes towards such hegemonic narratives. Through the focus of the text on the interactions of the community and characters, the writers in this study highlight the function of central characters' storytelling.

What distinguishes the central female characters in the works of these women, however, are the different strategies they use to tell stories of themselves and other women in the face of the discriminatory social norms of their communities. The female characters, depicted in different social classes and faced with various social limitations, are often able to weave their own narratives by resisting and challenging the dominant social structures. Marginalized in their specific communities, these protagonists change their social positions by refusing to play the dominant social games and attempting to write their own little narratives. This chapter, then, will show acts and practices of storytelling that redefine the female character's identity in the face of the formal and informal institutions. In order to understand the significance of storytelling in women's writings, this chapter will open with an overview of the intersection of feminist scholarship and storytelling, which will lead to the processes of storytelling, illustrated in two case studies: Simin Daneshvar's "A City Like Paradise" and Alice Munro's "Friend of My Youth."

Stories in this study are defined as narratives, acts, or utterances made by the female character in order to reveal the hegemonic structure of her community and to further resist, challenge, and/or change the female character's predetermined social position. On the one hand, there are prescribed narratives for characters to identify with in order to be considered a valid member of their community. On the other hand, storytelling, in the form of telling or retelling of narratives, acts as a form of communication that can destabilize social structures through unofficial channels. Storytelling then becomes a unique means for the female character to make her experience known to others, which in most cases simultaneously poses threats to the homogenizing social institutions of her community.

In addition, there is a sharp contrast between different points of view from which these two texts are narrated. While in the first case study, the story is narrated from a male point of view under the influence of a female focalizer and protagonist, the second text juxtaposes two narrative levels, both coming from female characters' points of view. Both texts, therefore, use other characters' points of view to comment on the role the protagonists in telling their stories, in order to highlight interactions and/or conflicts between the central characters and their community. This emphasis on the "storied selves" (Klassen 2008) of these two protagonists happens through the "transformative" effect of storytelling, an effect Hannah Arendt discusses in *The Human Condition*:

> Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life […] lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence until and unless they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such transformations occurs in storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences. (51)

Thus, storytelling first involves the necessity and significance of sharing personal experiences with others. Others—in the form of the community around the protagonist, or in this chapter the narrators of her stories—therefore, play an indispensable role in the process of storytelling. Without their presence, the referent position would remain empty and storytelling cannot truly take place. For instance, in the case of a newcomer in a community, Arendt adds, "[human beings] together […] start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact" (184). This statement highlights the inevitable interactions between individuals and

communities and their reciprocal influences. By foregrounding the function of individual action, Arendt argues that such action has the potential to affect another, so that the whole process can influence everyone in a community. A similar process takes place in the two short stories in this chapter: as the focalizers of the stories, these narrators comment on the central female characters' actions, while they also show in what ways their own identities are affected through the stories they tell about these characters.

3.1. Storytelling and Contemporary Feminist Scholarship

The importance of storytelling in feminist studies, as Shari Stone-Mediatore observes, is in that "feminist thinkers and activists have continued to tell stories of experience in efforts to "break open political space" for change (935). Such revelatory practices could lead to understanding the role of women writers and transnational feminist literary theorists to be the subversion of patriarchal narratives by and through their writings. As Toril Moi also suggests "a woman defines herself through the way she lives her embodied situation in the world" (72), so it is through their stories and retelling of individual experiences of women that women writers go beyond borders to reimagine women's social positions in the way their female characters can reconstruct their identities through acts of storytelling.

Storytelling has been recognized and used as an act to challenge social structures such as patriarchal institutions in more recent feminist scholarships. These instances of narratives of community function in similar ways in order to show the arbitrariness of the dominant social rules and structures, where the female individual can alter a part or the whole of these narratives in order to express her individual and at times marginalized self. Concepts such as storytelling and representation, therefore, have become central discourses in a number of

literary and social feminist theories. Dorothy Smith, a recognized Standpoint feminist critic, emphasizes the social function of representations of women:

> The zones of present life with which we are concerned pass beyond Marx's conception of social relations; they were present only nascently in his time. We are part of a world a major segment of the organization of which is mediated by texts; forms of discourse have emerged that are vested in social relations and organization; reason, knowledge, concepts are more than merely attributes of individual consciousness, they are embedded in, organized, and are integral to social relations in which subjects act […] women are not just the passive products of socialization; they are active; they create themselves. (121)

This "creating themselves" happens mainly in the form of female individuals changing their pre-fabricated stories that are socially imposed on them. Through this recreation, women writers in this study are responding to "the need for creative, interpretive work – in effect, storytelling- to transform women's everyday experiences of discontent into feminist knowledge" (Stone-Mediatore 936). Individual's agency and ways to write back to the community, then, can be emphasized by depicting everyday experiences of women and the contrast between the central characters' personal experiences and the other women in these textual communities.

These individual actions observed on two different levels of storytelling, in the form of fiction writing and characters' stories, are highlighted in the case studies in this chapter. These individual representations of gender come in the form of telling or retelling stories of the female protagonist who challenges dominant ideology of the community and reshapes her

identity. This way, examining the language games in each textual community will give us the processes by which the female character is able to weave out her story by using the community's linguistic and rhetoric structures. Similar language games are used to tell their challenge of the formal institutions' stories. As Hilde Lindemann Nelson in her study of the relationship of gender and language games in "Drawing Boundaries" points out:

> Language, like the forms of life in which it is embedded, contains within it the possibilities of self-challenge and change, of insubordination and learned indifference. If a player of the language game of theorizing feminism wishes to issue a challenge to the rule whereby "woman" is constructed in binary opposition to "man", she has only to look to the liberatory strategies already in place in the feminist theorizing game to find the resources that allow the players to alter their practice. (219-220)

It is through the "liberatory strategies" of the female characters in these texts and their different practices of the already established and practiced language games—as shown through the presence of other characters in these texts—that they are able to challenge and ultimately subvert them. In the case studies in this work, then, storytelling in its different forms become women's liberatory strategies.

Lafrance and Mackenzie-Mohr in their "Women Counter-Storying Their Lives" suggest that "stories are constructed within dynamic individual, social, and political contexts, and thus are instruments of self-creation and power. They work on (and are worked on by) social and political forces, so that when they reach the status of common sense, they become naturalized and normalized, thereby serving to maintain the status quo as vehicles of dominant ideologies. (3). While it is true that such narratives have the potential to become the dominant ideologies,

my study demonstrates what such literary texts have in common is creating textual spaces to challenge the status quo. In other words, what fictional stories and communities can achieve in this equation is highlighting possibilities rather than stating social realities.

Moreover, while the narratives—in both their meta or little forms—have their similar linguistic and social structures, they enable the female individual to practice her agency: "[I]n the absence of meaningful lexicons, women are challenged in narrating and giving meaning to their experiences" (6). In this regard, Marjorie L. Devault also suggests that there is a potential for connection between the text and the audience in this "shared space" between what she calls "stories and counter-stories" (26).

She further discusses Bamberg and Andrews's idea in that "many narrative scholars […] have found it useful to think about stories and counter-stories. This framework offers a powerful way to conceptualize the power and politics of storytelling" (26). As Devault observer, therefore, the effect of individual storytelling within a community can be examined through the stories the female characters tell and retell in these stories. In this study, different levels of storytelling in each text shows the different ways through which stories are told and storytelling as a means of self-expression is emphasized. These effects could be measured based on the extent to which the female protagonist's voice can be heard through the narrative layers in each text.

3.2. Telling Stories as Acts of Expressing Women's Lived Experiences

Storytelling happens in different forms in these texts: while all the central characters seem to be making stories, the ways in which they engage in telling them and the stories they tell are different. The narrators in these texts mainly tell stories about others, yet their stories

ultimately become stories they tell about themselves. In Munro's "Friend of My Youth," for instance, the characters retell the story of the central female protagonist in their specific ways that make up the text itself, the narrators ironically reveal their own selves in their different ways of fabricating the same tale. As will be discussed in the case study in this chapter, the two narrators tell stories about the central character from their differing points of view.

Via these different narrative points of view then, the two narrators of the story create their own two different accounts of the story in addition to the way other characters interact with the protagonists of their stories, including their own relationships with them. Therefore, the narrative layers of the story itself foreground the intricate relationship of an individual and others in a community. Whereas in many instances in these stories, characters are merely retelling stories that they had previously heard, they create new forms for these tales with new intentions for themselves. The female character in Munro's "Friend of My Youth" retells stories she has heard and tries to find ways to relate them to one another and to herself. Similarly, it is through such retellings of stories that the central female protagonist in Daneshvar's "A City like Paradise" is able to make sense of the world around her and her own place in it. Moreover, these narrations of their realities and alternative fabrications of what they *could be* enable the characters to reimagine themselves in the way they desire. The stories they tell and retell, therefore, become the way to express their various lived experiences as women and assert their identities through their storytelling.

Teresa De Lauretis's "The Technologies of Gender," named after Foucault's "Technology of Sex," defines gender as "representation and as self-representation [it] is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies,

and critical practices, as well as practices of daily Life" (2). By emphasizing "representation and self-representation," De Lauretis confirms the idea that gender identity is far from a fixed concept, and therefore, could be shaped and reshaped based on social and individual practices. It is with this theoretical approach in mind that De Lauretis defines experience as "a complex of meaning effects, habits, dispositions, associations, and perceptions resulting from the semiotic interaction of self and outer world" (18). Whereas she points out that historically speaking a woman's experience was defined in relation to male's perspective or a male-centered view, De Lauretis emphasizes a reimagination and a reconstruction of the self is possible, in that an individual's gender correlates with the social group with which she is associated:

> The term gender is, actually, the representation of a relation, that of belonging to a class, a group, a category. Gender is the representation of a relation, […] gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities, which are previously constituted as a class, and that relation is one of belonging; thus, gender assigns to one entity, say an individual, a position within a class, and therefore also a position vis-a-vis other preconstituted classes […] So gender represents not an individual but a relation, and a social relation; in other words, it represents an individual for a class. (3-4)

Based on this definition, gender, as a social construct, is reconstructed over and over again in relation to specific classes or groups of individuals. Therefore, the individual can reconstruct their gender in relation to the social relations in which they are situated. In other words, as R. W. Connell in her *Masculinities* states, "[s]ocial practice is creative and inventive, but not inchoate. It responds to particular situations and is generated within definite structures

of social relations" (72). The responsiveness of this reconstruction to outward social structures is what makes the study of individual identity formation within the community she is situated.

In addition, while the individual acts of resistance can challenge the rules, according to De Lauretis it takes more than the individual to bring a dramatic change to the system. Gender then "as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies […] and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life" (2). Thus, it is through both representation—the perception and portrayal of the female character's identity by others and characters' self-representation—in this study that the female character is able to reconstruct her identity.

I agree with De Lauretis's idea of the reciprocal effects of individual and community narratives—by distancing her position from those of Foucault and Althusser—on redefining gender in that it voices a different view on the position of the female subject in her community. It is through the emphasis that De Lauretis places on the individual in relation to her community that her idea diverges from other theoreticians of the self who believe in the inevitability of the social and economic position of the subject as the sole determinant of her identity formation. De Lauretis distinguishes her position on the subject in that she considers the female individual as capable of resisting, challenging and changing the social structures of her community:

> Unlike Althusser's subject, who, being completely "in" ideology, believes himself to be outside and free of it, the subject that I see emerging from current writings and debates within feminism is one that is at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision. (10)

The distinction De Lauretis makes is of great significance when arguing for the agency of the female characters in changing their stories in this study. While Althusser's subject seems to only have the illusion of being outside ideology, the female subject that De Lauretis envisions is the one conscious of her being positioned within a hegemonic discourse who actively tries to find her way out of it.

Therefore, through their active roles in their communities and their acts of storytelling in the case studies in this chapter, the female characters are situated in liminal positions as both the storytellers and the embodiment of the stories they tell. Through the analyses of the texts, it will be shown that these liminal positions are created through the depictions of their stories and the narrative layers used in the texts. While this form allows lifelike interactions between the community and characters, their ability to use the community's dominant language games and to fabricate their personal little narratives is achieved through different narrative layers used in these texts.

3.3. Narratives, and New Possibilities in a *Postmodern Condition*[15]

Women writers in this study create spaces for the characters to generate their own little narratives of who they are and what positions they have in their communities. By presenting their personal narratives, or in Lyotard's theory, little narratives, these characters can change the homogenizing effects of their community's metanarratives in line with how Simon Malpas interprets it as "the wider range of different language games that are considered legitimate within society, the more open and pluralist that society can become" (30). These narratives are

[15] *The Postmodern Condition: A Report in Knowledge* (Lyotard 1984)

often small and temporary, but capable of creating disruptions in the system, which confirms their liberating rather than confining nature. Richard Delgado also points out the ability of stories and "counter-stories" in (re)making communities in that,

> Most who write about storytelling focus on its community-building functions: stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. Counter-stories, which challenge the received wisdom, do that as well. They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. (2414)

Therefore, for "the new possibilities" to emerge, individuals should be given space to tell their stories. Whether telling stories or counter-stories, these characters are communicators of their personal truths to the public. Furthermore, the processes of storytelling are directly related to the relationships between individuals and community, which is embedded in the way language games and narratives function in these texts. Danielle Fuller also recognizes the importance of textual communities in providing spaces for "writing the everyday" when she argues that "textual communities offer an arena in which the politics of language and power can be actively engaged and negotiated within a group" (8). Thus, it is in the processes of storytelling—those of the text and/or the characters—that reallife experiences of women can be represented, and their social issues can be foregrounded against the community's hegemonizing narratives.

Lifelike depictions of everyday life[16] in fiction, therefore, is another feature of these texts in creating fictional communities that are modelled after real communities and their formal and informal institutions, through both representation of hegemonic community and the textual community made by characters' counter-stories. In her study, *New Visions of Community in Contemporary American Fiction*, Magali Cornier Michael notes that "individual interests are always shifting as members enter and leave and as the interests of the individual member change. As such, communities have the potential to be inclusive and to create spaces for difference—although they can also function to ensure sameness through exclusionary practices" (12), emphasizing the close interrelations of the two specific yet dramatically different, functions of communities, inclusivity and marginalization of characters.

Depiction of everyday life, as an important element of narratives of community can also be a manfestation of the way the world operates and mirror social interactions between characters. I regard the texts in this study as writings with a political agenda: in their recreation of reality, such works can go further than show readers what the world is like and change their view of what the world instead *can be* like. As will be seen in the case studies in this chapter then, while the image of the woman or "the true character of the narrator remains finally

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[16]Lifelike depictions of characters and social communities, central to my case-studies, are closely affiliated with the way Lyotard defines realism: "[Realism] is the art that reflects back a culture's beliefs and ideas in a way that it can immediately recognized […] by protecting consciousness from doubts about the way things are, serves to perpetuate narratives about the world: the established language games are presented as true" (44). While in this definition, the life-like depictions in the text is essential to reflect the communities' social structures, the case-studies in effect show that based on the distinction that Lyotard makes, these texts present the "postmodern condition" where the grand narratives of the social structures can no longer hold and are therefore replaced by little narratives. In other words, these texts present narratives in two ways: by presenting the grand or metanarratives to show the social structures and by critiquing them by introducing the individual's ability to make her own little narratives.

unpresentable" (Malpas 48), the forms and processes through which she affects her community will be highlighted.

3.4. Living My Life in My Stories: The Power of Storytelling in Daneshvar's "A City like Paradise"

Simin Daneshvar's "A City Like Paradise," which is taken from her 1961 collection of short stories by the same title, portrays different female characters in different social situations in the decades prior to 1960s in Iran. Daneshvar has an exceptional gift for depicting the life of her contemporary society and the social reinforcement of traditional gender roles within that society. Her stories are realistic in that they show women, in different walks of life, in search of their identity in a patriarchal society, and their emphasis on women's roles in changing the social structure.

In this story, as well as many others, Daneshvar foregrounds patriarchal social structures and the situation of the female character in it, by showing the readers a "slice of her life." The story gives the central female character a voice and an identity from which she is deprived in her community, and it becomes the means for the female character and the woman writer to examine and reimagine their social structures. The character might not have the space to directly introduce an explicit counter-narrative to give her the needed credulity; since she has to follow the rules in order to play the game, she may in fact use the structure of the rule to change its significance. This form provides a similar context to make the necessary space for the little narratives through changing the language games. This alternative way is introduced in Daneshvar's fiction by highlighting both the class and the patriarchal struggles of the characters, enabling the central character to use dominant narrative structures to change the dominant discourses of patriarchy.

Daneshvar's characters try to find their selfhood and deal with the social situations in which they live. Thus, a woman in a society that treats her as the Other is both under attack by her own perception of her body as different from that of man and by other community members in treating her as different. Daneshvar's story exemplifies how the female character's little narratives can work to negate the power of social norms. Farzaneh Milani also emphasizes Daneshvar's depiction of the gender roles and their specific social interactions of her contemporary Iran in that,

> [t]he society depicted in [Daneshvar's] body of writing is [not] unpatriarchal or egalitarian. Far from it. In effect, Daneshvar depicts a male-dominated, male centred society in which women are oppressed and suppressed. Yet, in her works, the extent of male domination is not overrated. Daneshvar assesses man's power dialectically--as a reciprocity of influence. (*Veils and Words not Swords* 186)

Indeed, it is her avoidance of exaggeration and the understated nature of her character depictions that make Daneshvar's work stand out in contemporary Persian literature, and further makes her work suitable for sociological analysis of the representation of Persian women in works of fiction. Daneshvar's "A City Like Paradise" portrays the life of Mehrangiz, a black maid, who has been in the service of a family since her mother was taken as a bondwoman when she was a young girl. Mehrangiz's mother, having reached old age, also works in another household. However, Mehrangiz is not merely the representative of women in the underprivileged social class to which she belongs; as the protagonist of this story, she is the site of the shared struggles among women of her generation. Through her interactions with other members and especially the girls and women of the family for whom she works, the social

life of a woman in a typically Persian patriarchal community becomes evident in the text. The story of her suffering in this community also highlights other female characters' struggles because of their gender. Thus, the power of gendered hegemonic language games and narratives in determining the social status of the character becomes visible through Mehrangiz's struggles as a woman.

One way through which the text shows gender hierarchy is through the narrative layers of the story. Emblematic of the androcentric society in which Mehrangiz lives, the story is narrated from the diegetic point of view of Ali, the only son and youngest child of the family who regards Mehrangiz, not as just a maid or a nanny, but as his own mother. The second layer of storytelling belongs to Mehrangiz, when she weaves bedtime stories for Ali from bits and pieces of her own experiences and expresses her unfulfilled hopes in her contemporary community to recognize her as an adequate member.

In fact, while the story is narrated from the limited omniscient point of view of Ali, Mehrangiz occupies the hypodiegetic level of narration as the protagonist of this short story as well as the narrator of her own stories in the text. Hypodiegetic narrative level is defined as "[t]he stories told by fictional characters [… that] constitute a second-degree narrative, hence a hypodiegetic level" (Rimmon-Kenan 93). This level could be used in order to convey a theme or foreground a specific character—and her means of expression in this case—to create distance from the author's voice in the story. The story, then, opens with Ali's anticipation of hearing his bedtime stories from Mehrangiz:

> When Mehrangiz turned out the light in the kitchen, Ali bunched himself up in the bed with excitement, pressing his face into the pillow. Mehrangiz blew out the lamp with

> one breath and lay down in bed so quietly that, had Ali not lain awake, he would never have known. Then Ali would call to Mehrangiz, pleading for stories. And every night the same stories were repeated—the stories of Mehrangiz and her mother and other Negresses. (56)

Ironically, the horrific stories of Mehrangiz's past, through repetition, have turned into bedtime stories, despite not sounding like appealing children's tales. She recounts the stories of her past, of her foremothers and the cruelties that were done to them—the story of her "being" in the world. By recounting her story, Mehrangiz is giving voice to the silent suffering of women in her situation and is making their hidden experiences known to others. While Ali sympathizes and further identifies with the little girl of Mehrangiz's story who is captured, as a male subject, he is simultaneously alienated and "estranged" by the thought of the cruel things the "strange man" does to her. The story that Mehrangiz tells Ali is the story of her own mother, Baji, as she was forcefully taken by a "strange man" and sold to a family. In one story, Mehrangiz's mother is a child, playing by the river with the other black children, stark naked, when a man wearing a kaffiyeh and headband dismounts from a camel litter and shouts in Arabic "Come! Come," only Mehrangiz's mother runs to him. [...] Mehrangiz's mother, then a very young child, cries and struggles. The hand smacks her hard on the mouth [...] upon waking she finds herself on a ship [...]. Then they sell Mehrangiz's mother to Ali's grandfather (56).

The fact that Ali hears this story every night emphasizes the repetitive nature of Mehrangiz's experiences, which are similar to other women's stories belonging to the past generation. Moreover, Ali's focalization of the story is significant as that of a male subject's in the male-centred community. Ali, like any other child, does not tire of listening to the same

stories, and he also comes to recognize the violence of Mehrangiz's mother's experiences. Ali, as the audience of Mehrangiz's stories, insists on hearing these stories over and over again, as if this way he could bring on revenge on the "strange man," the villain of Mehrangiz's story, the man with whom he could potentially identify as the male protagonist of the story: an alter-ego that Ali wishes to defeat, both as an imaginative child and an adult later in the course of the story.

Ali, as the focalizer of Mehrangiz's stories, is also a significant character in the text; the stories affect his gender consciousness at an early age. As Houshang Golshiri[17] also suggests, "the limited omniscient point of view in 'A City Like Paradise' from Ali's perspective, offers a contrast in the two opposing poles in his life. […] Ali's life also consists of a [process] parallel to Mehrangiz's life: stories that she tells him and later to Bijan are dreamlike as well as realistic depictions of life[18]" (39). Throughout the course of the story, Ali grows to be a young man as well as the continued narratee of Mehrangiz's stories. Just like Daneshvar with her stories aimed at her contemporary readers, Mehrangiz's stories have a capacity to change the narratives that have marginalized her and other women in similar situations. Her stories act as agents of change in the dominant discourse of patriarchy since they provide textual space through which the voice of the marginalized characters can be heard: since Mehrangiz tells the story from the point of view of the "little girl" over and over again, the story itself is giving voice to the marginalized female characters. Milani also highlights the historic function of storytelling

[18] My translation

for women in that it gives them the ability to instruct children, and make them conscious of the world around them:

> Storytelling, traditionally the province of women in Iran, has been a form of discourse well integrated into their lives. Considered a safe and domestic craft, it entertained children and entangled them in webs of stories, it kept them away from trouble, it controlled them. Women held the key to the magic world of tales. (*Veils and Words* 177-178)

This "magic world of tales" in the form of a *mise en abyme* enables Mehrangiz, as well as Daneshvar in her contemporary society, to communicate women's struggles to their audience. During the time when Daneshvar was writing (mid to late twentieth century), women's struggles for equality were on the rise, and the society was dealing with the conflicts between tradition and western modernization. In his study "Mirage or Mirror: The Formation of Women's Identity in Legends, Anecdotes and Short Story," Sa'ad Pira also acknowledges the essential role of the woman storyteller in Persian literature in her traditional role as "the storyteller" as well as the "story's protagonist" and in her role in modern story forms as "the storyteller, narrator, and the protagonist":

> The identity of woman and its formation is emphasized in the story as an [essential] concept in these two or three topics. Since in order for the storyteller to narrate her story, first there needs to be a motivational and rhetorical quality provoked in her. [In other words] the storyteller needs to be faced with a question and seek an answer—and the environmental and empirical conditions allow her to pose this mental challenge—in

order for her to be able to replace the old and traditionally accepted concepts with new ones[19]. (152)

The reimagination of the representation of woman in Iranian history and social structure then is a result of recreation of female characters in contemporary Persian literature. Stories with not only a female storyteller but also depicted as a narrator or the protagonist of the story, therefore, opened textual and social space for women to express themselves as individuals. Storytelling then becomes a means, and the only one for that matter, available to Mehrangiz to be able to acquire a voice and make her own situation heard, by telling them to Ali as the representative of the future generation.

In order to challenge marginalizing narratives for women contemporaneous to her, Daneshvar employs the same function of storytelling for to attract their already-conditioned mentalities, to instruct them with her stories: Mehrangiz's stories act as alternative voices to Daneshvar's contemporary dominant narratives of patriarchy. These narratives come in this way to influence Ali's consciousness, as a space which is not yet tinged by gendered hegemonic narratives. Moreover, on another level, the story provides a space for Daneshvar's contemporary audience to actively change the already weakened patriarchal narratives of their time, in that "the event that happens in the modern short story is that the female protagonist is gradually separated from the text and is transformed in a way that she starts to recreate

[19]My translation

herself[20]" (Pira 160). This recreation of the self and others then happens through the character's storytelling.

Mehrangiz is able to influence Ali, the central male character, directly by her stories so that he can see the male character in Mehrangiz's story as a living man whom he can fight and defeat: "Ali had heard this story many times, and every night when he heard it again he swore that if he got his hands on the strange man he'd cut him into pieces with the kitchen knife" (57). This is a starting point for opening up a discursive space not only for the female character's self-representation, but also by influencing the identity formation of a male character, who will later be witness to women's social issues in a patriarchal community. Through Mehrangiz's tales, Ali, as a male subject, gets to learn about her experiences; the stories he hears enable him to identify with the underprivileged situation of Mehrangiz in their contemporary community.

Although the story begins with Mehrangiz's past, this is not the only story Mehrangiz recounts. The other story is the tale of "A City like Paradise." This is another tale she has heard but recounts it as if she had experienced it herself. The story portrays a slave woman, Nur ol-Saba, who is finally recognized as a high standing figure by her people and is allowed to return to her land in a most respectful way: "When Nur ol-Saba comes, all of them bow to her. And they bow to her over and over. [...] they're bowing to her so low their heads touch their knees. Now she must be the queen of her city. From that day on, sweetheart, it's every black's dream in Shiraz for someone to come and take them away" (58).

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[20] My translation

As a marginalized character, it has become Mehrangiz's "larger than life" dream for others to recognize and respect her, so that she can feel a sense of belonging. It is larger than life, since in her contemporary society, she cannot realize her fantasy, which is only possible in another time and place, in “paradise.” Furthermore, whereas the first story portrays her situation in belonging to the class of slaves, the second story shows the possibility of her acquiring not just a subjectivity of her own, but that of the queen of the land. She will need a place such as "paradise" where the social rules do not dictate her existence.

In her present time and place, or in her social situation, Mehrangiz is not able to even physically identify with Nur ol-Saba. She further reminds Ali that she cannot in fact be "Nur-ol-Saba" herself. She explains that this character is not like her: “who’s got no eyebrows at all, and eyes like split peas, and a nose flat as a straw mat, and lips like sticks” (57). Influenced by the dominant narratives of “femininity,” she regards herself as an "Other," not just as a woman in comparison with men in the community, but with the women as well; through her experience of being the Other, she ironically shares the belief with the "privileged" female characters in what the “perfect” image of beauty is and that she does not look like it. She sees herself in her situation through the lens of others. Thus, she has internalized the social and ethnic discriminations she has been subjected to and does not see any changes possible from the vantage point of her situation in this social structure.

Not only is Mehrangiz not seen as an autonomous individual by other characters in her community, she does not consider herself as an independent individual in this community, seen through her description of Nur ol-Saba’s features in contrast to her own. In Moi's words, “considered as a situation, the body encompasses both the objective and the subjective aspects

of experience" (68). Moi further compares Merleau-Ponty's idea of subjectivity to that of Beauvoir's in that "the body is our perspective on the world, and at the same time that body is engaged in a dialectical interaction with its surroundings" (68). Therefore, unless a woman is recognized as a subject by others in her social setting, she is not able to experience individuality. Mehrangiz is only able to experience her individuality through her connection to others, and in this case, through her storytelling with the children.

Although Mehrangiz is struggling both as a woman and socio-economically marginalized character, she is still able to use her stories to be heard and recognized even if by only one person in her lifetime. While she is not able to change her "situatedness" in her own lifetime due to the discriminatory social structure, Mehrangiz presents Ali, as a representative of the next generation and as a male character, with her own story that suggests a place like "paradise" could exist; a place where women can exist and can have a subjectivity of their own. Her story is the means through which she sees it possible to be potentially recognized by others, so that she could experience a mind and a voice of her own.

For instance, when Baji Delnavaz, Mehrangiz's mother, loses her job, she comes to beg Ali's mother to provide her with a place to sleep for the night. Her request is denied: "Baji Delnavaz sat at the end of the room near the door. Weeping, she told them that her master had thrown her out in her old age. Now she had no place to go. Ali and his younger sister started to cry. But the older sister [ignored Baji's pleas and diverted the younger children's attention by saying] 'Let's go play'" (59). While Ali and his younger sister start to cry because of Baji Delnavaz's misery, Ali's older sister has a different reaction. She has learned that the maids are to be treated differently than people from higher social classes. She, who

seems to have already identified with the social class protocols, treats Mehrangiz and her mother, Baji, in much the same way that her mother treats them. She, too, knows the dominant narratives and adheres to the rules of the game.

While Ali's mother does not seem to have more agency than Mehrangiz or her mother, she cannot possibly sympathize with Mehrangiz and Baji. By racial and class discrimination against the maids and having no other way to express herself in this male-entered community, his mother also gets to impose her power through the dominant language games of their class privileges and the absence of the maids' individuality.

The character who would be expected to understand Mehrangiz's suffering as a woman is Ali's mother; however, she cannot rise above her oppression either. For instance, once she finds out about the affair her husband is having with Mehrangiz, the only way she is portrayed as protesting her husband's infidelity is by hiding her husband's glasses, taking her anger out on Mehrangiz, instead. The other way Ali's mother is able to protest is to make Mehrangiz, the other woman, suffer. This is the only time that the mother expresses her feelings about her husband's affair with Mehrangiz: "[T]here's no room here for me and this […]. [A]ll of you prefer this ugly creature to me. Like father, like son. I know you'll find your way to her, too" (73). His mother has the ability to only exert her power on her children and Mehrangiz in this social order and cannot fight her husband's socially privileged position that her son will also share; therefore, once she finds out about Mehrangiz's pregnancy, she takes it out on her and throws her out of the house.

As seen in this example, Ali's mother is another female character in the text that reinforces the patriarchal discourse, believing and practicing the dominant male-centred

narratives. She is unable to rise above the community's predefined social position of women. The mother as a woman who is herself struggling with her predefined social position, perpetuates these narratives in not only accusing Mehrangiz, but also in acting as the one who eventually makes her lose her job and shelter.

Ali's identification with Mehrangiz as his mother could also be taken on another level. As a child, Ali sees Mehrangiz and her mother, Baji, as the victims of violence of "the strange man" and vows to avenge them when he sees him. By the time he grows up, however, Ali starts to realize that this is not only the story of the maids, but those of his mother, sisters, and other women as well. For instance, when he is talking about the slaves who built the Egyptian pyramids to Nayyer, his childhood sweetheart: “Mehrangiz, eyes wide with wonder, [asks] ‘Aqa, are the people of Egypt black?’ Ali said, ‘No, Mehrangiz, they’re not black, but it’s not only blacks who are treated cruelly’” (70). This statement shows that Ali, as an adult, is able to realize the complexity of social politics in his society and that it is not only slaves who were socially discriminated against but many people in similar social conditions. Here, Ali is trying to show how discrimination can happen in many different ways in a social structure and how it applies to women around him in his contemporary society. As a child he had sympathized with Mehrangiz’s sufferings through her stories, but now he realizes that his sisters, Nayyer, and even his own mother are the victims of their social situations as women, reinforced by the dominant patriarchal discourse.

The power of these dominant social structures is emphasized when even Ali, as a male subject, cannot dramatically change the narratives, since he does not have the financial authority. Ali’s perspective broadens when, as the only son, he becomes the head of the family

after his father's death. Nayyer, his childhood sweetheart, is married off to an older man, because of financial conditions of their families. Not only does the girl, as a female character, lack any alternative to marriage, but Ali cannot object to her arranged marriage either, because he lacks the financial agency, despite having a man's subjectivity. Thus, the story emphasizes his helplessness even as a male character to change the dominant social structures of which he himself is a part and is emblematic of the individuals' inability toc hange their situations despite their ability to challenge their social structures.

Towards the end of the story, due to an accident, Mehrangiz is burnt so severely that when Ali finds her on her death-bed, he has no way to save her and has to watch her die. The text closes with the shadow of the pregnant Nayyer, who had taken Mehrangiz in out of pity, on the wall that reminds him of a pyramid. "Ali was sitting by Mehrangiz's corpse. Nayyer was standing, her belly prominent. The shadow she cast on the wall resembled a pyramid resting on its side" (83). This image at the end of the story could be the text's way of concluding that femininity has been a means of enslaving women in patriarchal social structures just as Egyptian slaves were subjugated by the Pharaohs, and that in a patriarchal society where women do not have agency to choose their paths of life, the fate of a slave girl is not much better than that of her seemingly superior female counterparts. Moreover, while Mehrangiz, as the symbol of her generation, dies, she leaves behind her legacy in the hands of another generation.

Although the story portrays the social position of a marginalized woman, it also presents the possibility that women have a voice of their own in making up and rewriting their little narratives despite authoritative and hegemonic structures of power and dominant language

games. These characters are also representative of Daneshvar's works, which deal more broadly with female experiences in her contemporary society as a site of gender inequalities. As Milani argues, "although many of [Daneshvar's] female protagonists are alienated individuals, they reveal both the limitations and potential of their lives" (1985: 335). This double-edgedness of her depiction of women's lives and their struggles with being defined or "mythified" by patriarchal societies emphasizes the tensions between the individuals and the community.

It is only through her stories at the heart of the text that Mehrangiz is able to hope for her autonomous subjectivity as well as that of women in her social situation. Although her social status seems to be lower than that of others, the other female characters in this story are not presented as women in possession of an autonomous subjectivity, either. At the end of the story, however, Mehrangiz, as the representative of marginalized women in this society, seems to have done her share—and has given her life for that matter—in order to find a new way of life for the next generation, leaving a legacy of storytelling for other women to rewrite their subjectivity more freely. While it is also problematic that the central character has to die in order to put an end to the narratives that surround her life, Mehrangiz brings about change in her community. Mehrangiz uses the only power she has, that of her stories, to fight her unjust social structure; the retelling of her stories spreads the word that this structure needs to change for the female characters to find their own social position.

Mehrangiz goes through different hardships not only because she is a maid, but also because she is a woman, while other women in the story also suffer because of their positions as female subjects. Mehrangiz not only survives by telling her stories, but she is also able to

affect the children's mindsets through her stories. The two stories in the text perfectly summarize the sufferings and hopes of marginalized woman for a reimagined identity in Daneshvar's society. The story of Mehrangiz's life and her own fictional stories work as *mise-en-abymes* to capture the recurrent repressed condition of women in that their attempts to change the social structures, however short-lived and temporary, could instigate changes in the patriarchal structures of the society. Furthermore, the way the stories are woven into the text reinforces the power of storytelling in order to legitimize and relate the individual stories to the shared experiences of women.

Even on her death-bed, the last words that Mehrangiz utters are about arriving at the "city like paradise" and fleeing to the realm of stories that had given her life and agency in her lifetime. She becomes the Scheherazade of her story: she lives her life through the stories and becomes an agent to rewrite her own, as well as those of others to come. As her name suggests in Persian [spreading love], Daneshvar's central character is sacrificing her life and letting go of ever arriving at her subjectivity to accomplish her project of "spreading love" against prejudices and marginalization of women. Abolishing patriarchal discourses will have to wait for a better world to come.

3.5. Storytellers in Search of the Unpresentable[21] in Munro's "Friend of My Youth"

The second case study in this chapter, Alice Munro's "Friend of My Youth," is the titular story taken from her collection. In this story, Munro attempts to show the significance of other people—their mundane tacks on storytelling—through the spaces she leaves in her texts, and

[21] Borrowed from the title of Pirandello's play "Six Characters in Search of an Author"

the narrative voices through which the stories are told. Gayle Elliott suggests that these spaces that are created through stories are “ways in which women writers attempt to transform the structures of narrative, reshaping at once the concept of the short story and the aesthetic evaluations which define the [realistic] genre” (1); it is through the nuances of these narrative points of view that the readers get to see the contested image of the protagonist as well as those of the storytellers.

The text is narrated through the first narrative point of view of a woman who has heard the original story from her mother's telling and retelling the story of a woman she once knew, Flora. While the first level of narration presents Flora as the main character and the narrators as the other female characters’ perspectives, this second level ironically forms the stories of the narrators themselves, which are revealed through their own perspectives and their critiques of the characters of Flora’s story. The text, therefore, foregrounds the contrast of the two narrative voices through the differences in their perspectives on the various stories they are telling.

The first-person narrator recounts the story of Flora, a young woman her mother knew in her youth, who was left by her fiancée, Robert, when he pursues and marries Flora’s sister, Ellie, instead. It is significant that the story is told from both points of view, not only because Flora does not seem to negatively react to this betrayal, but also because upon finding out that her sister Ellie is pregnant by Robert, she is the one planning the wedding as well. Flora then decides to divide the house and live on her own when the narrator’s mother, the original storyteller, enters their house. The mother’s story, then, is based not on firsthand accounts but on rumours she had heard in the community.

Based on the narrator's account, the only detail that her mother seems to have known for certain about the family is that they were Cameronians, a strict religious sect, although the mother does not seem to provide more explanation. The mother soon learns that the family for whom she works cares a great deal about the social codes and practices of the community and it is in this environment that Ellie's marriage to Robert seems inevitable. Therefore, Ellie, who used to behave in an unorthodox manner, put an end to her behaviour at once and she is never again the wild girl she used to be: "She let Flora fix her up, she let herself be married, she was never wild from that day on" (10). Ellie does not seem to be resisting this transition, as she is perfectly familiar with the rules and the way she would be rejected by the community should she not give into marriage as a social institution.

Being married is to be observant of a series of rules, and this consciousness is what causes her identity shift in being tamed and entering womanhood as a social construct. Ellie has a miscarriage and remains childless, which is among the events the narrator's mother has heard about. The mother's story comes down to the daughter intermingled with the comments from members of the community:

> Perhaps Ellie had damaged it when she jumped from the barn beam and rolled in the snow and beat on herself. Even if she hadn't done that, people would have expected something to go wrong, with that chill or maybe one that came later. God dealt out punishment for hurry-up marriages—not just Presbyterians but almost everybody else believed that. God rewarded lust with dead babies, idiots, harelips and withered limbs and club feet. (10)

In these lines, the community seems to try different ways to explain and justify why she has had the miscarriage, but the one explanation to which the voice gives more weight is the religious narrative that premarital sex is bound to end in misery. The commentary clearly comes from the others' biased point of view and offers an example of a predefining narrative, since it positions Ellie based on some prescribed gender codes. The voice suggests that it is not only Presbyterians who believe that God would punish those who engage in premarital sex, but rather common sense; something which is believed by "almost everybody else." It reflects a "universal" narrative that such a deed should be punished, and the woman is the one who should face it all. Moreover, this is the narrative the mother is able to make in order to explain why Flora behaves in the selfless sacrificing way she does: God would punish Ellie for her.

The story of Flora is twice removed from the original, if we can indeed consider it the original, having been formed and reformed through different storytellers in the community. The narrator has heard the story from her late mother, whose version of the story does not seem well-wrought or reliable, since many things are left unsaid or are only vaguely implied. Yet, they are both significant as the acts of telling and retelling the story and as the only way for the story to come to life, for that matter. This is one instance where the community's condemning voice can be heard. Ellie has a miscarriage and loses her first child which was conceived out of wedlock. The reason for the miscarriage is unclear to the mother and the narrator. Regardless of the real reason behind it, the story the mother tells her daughter turns into a cautionary tale, since it is followed by a commentary condemning the way the baby was conceived and the fact that anyone who does that is supposed to face the consequences, in this

case, losing the child. It is not clear who is giving this commentary, but it seems that the mother is also sharing the collective voice of the community. As a result of this ambiguity and as the original narrator of this story, the mother also shares the community's point of view.

As discussed in the previous chapter, communities impose their hegemonic narratives on their subjects in various forms, such laws, institutions, and social rules. Although laws are directly made by the formal institutions such as religion and the legal system, communities also make up the traditions and help maintain them. Narratives and myths have their roots in political, religious or social rules, while it is often the people who reshape, strengthen, or weaken the power of these rules. Moreover, narratives are the means through which individuals gain the agency to (re)define their identities. Whereas the formal institutions predefine people and categorize them based on their sex, gender, race, religious affiliations, and social class, individuals often do not fit in these prefabricated identity boxes. Once they do not find themselves meeting the requirements and cannot identify with *what should be,* individuals become self-aware of these norms and are often treated as outcasts in communities as a result. Therefore, the Flora of the stories told by the mother and daughter can never be presented objectively and will need to take on an identity.

Due to the contrast seen in the way the characters of the story live their lives and the ways social institutions expect them to behave, Flora's experiences are not tangible to the two narrators. It is through this contrast in the narrative layers of "Friend of My Youth," that the agency of the protagonist can be seen, ironically not by the other two characters, the mother and the narrator, but instead through her reported resistance. These two perspectives on Flora's character make her identity formation in the text yet a more complicated process. For

instance, the mother does not seem to know a lot about Flora's religious background, and as the narrator tells the reader, she often "could not say" much about it: "My mother could not say who the Cameronians were or why they were called that. Some freak religion from Scotland, she said from the perch of her obedient and light-hearted Anglicanism" (5). Thus, the way she characterizes Flora is through her own interpretation of what it means to be a Cameronian.

This way, when she introduces the religious sect "Cameronian" through her mother's telling of this story the narrator creates another form of narrative suspense. Apparently, her mother was not the only one who "could not say" what they were; the narrator also seems unaware of who they are, incapable of explaining or reluctant to go into detail. Thus, the reader is also kept in the dark about the significance of Flora's religious affiliation. This inability to articulate further creates a gap in the text that appears simultaneously in the mother's identity formation as the first storyteller and in the identity formation of the character in question, Flora.

These intentional gaps in the story create spaces within the text, which does not allow the story to be told in a linear manner. For instance, one way that negativity is at work in the story is when the sentence "my mother could not tell" is used throughout the story in various forms, and is not followed by an explanation of why this "inability" exists. The narrator says no more than her mother "could not tell," and by this phrase she raises an expectation in the signification that is constantly deferred. The mother, as the female character who has the original point of view of this story does not have the agency to "tell." "Could not tell" signifies the lack of ability, or agency in telling more; the problem is not that she does not "have"

anything to add, but that she *cannot*. The text does not provide either the mother or the daughter with the voice or ability to *explain* but to simply *tell* their stories in that the story never truly solidifies and creates the possibility of having numerous storylines. Thus, negativity is used in the text through the narrative levels and their inability to tell the whole story in a consistent way.

In other words, the narrator's account of Flora is itself under the influence of the narrator's own private experiences and beliefs. As Marjorie DeVault also observes, "no story is truly 'new' [in that it is] simply springing from an individual speaker's experience. Instead, stories are tied in complex ways not only to the teller's experience, but also to the frames that shape her interpretation of experience, and the knowledge and expectations of listeners" (26). This way, stories that one tells or re-tells in different ways speak of the storyteller's own experiences and biased perspective as well, which challenge the conventional narrative structures and the validity of any one account of the story over others. Thus, while the narrator believes that her account is the "original" one, occupying the first level of narration in the text, she is herself merely a participant of her own story.

It is in this context of religious othering of Flora that the narrator mentions some practices of Cameronians when she remembers what she was told by her mother about the Grieves family. For instance, the narrator reminds the readers that although Cameronians seem to have quite strict rules, it seems that they just expect their own practitioners to follow the rules: The narrator indicates that "it turned out that [her] mother was exempt from these rules," as an outsider of the community (5). In addition, bits and pieces of the text tell us about the Grieves' family customs that are apparently in line with the community, such as the time

Flora rides the horse with Robert. The narrator seems convinced that Flora is capable of riding the horse, yet she does not do so in his presence. The statement is followed by "it must always be the man who drove" (6), introducing a social norm indicating the traditional role women are given in this community.

Ellie, as another female character, is not given a voice of her own in the story. She is silenced once she decides to speak out in order to express her physical sufferings and the toll her miscarriages have had on her deteriorating health condition. By choosing to speak up, she disregards an unwritten rule in the community that a woman should not talk about her private life, especially regarding about her body: "[H]er numb silence passed off, and she became a complainer. If anybody came to visit, she would talk about the peculiarities of her headaches or describe her latest fainting fit, or even—in front of men, in front of unmarried girls or children—go into bloody detail about what Flora called her 'disappointments'" (10). Her voice fades away and is eventually erased from the narrative as a result of not following the rules of the community.

Therefore, this is the only part in which Ellie speaks. Yet, as Flora suggests, no one wants to hear about her "disappointments." Anything regarding her body and her feminine experience is not tolerated within this community, especially when it is "in front of men" or "unmarried girls or children." Due to her not following the social rules and codes of behaviour and talking about issues she is not supposed to share, she is denied a voice in the community and in the text. Therefore, according to the narrator, soon she stops talking, and the last thing the text tells us about her is her untimely death as a result of her ongoing illness.

Another female character who enters this community, Audrey, faces a similar condition to the other female characters, despite her different social standing as a working woman. She is the nurse who enters the house in order to take care of Ellie when she falls fatally sick. The first questions of the community challenge her social standing as a woman. As an unmarried woman in this male-centred community, she is not supposed to have any money of her own or a car. As seen through the mother's reported speech, as a woman she must have acquired her money by fraud; or she must have made one of her male patients alter his will or leave her the money; or she must have fooled him or exercised power over him (14). There is yet another explanation offered by the community: she has probably stolen the money from another patient without his noticing. It follows, then, that she cannot be trusted. Based on the presuppositions that male-centred communities create condemning the different social position of a career woman, it is "customary" for her to be labelled as such in this community. Moreover, her way of life is in fact contrary to the mother's generation of young women who tried to work in order to secure funds for their future marriages.

Flora is the one, once again, to trust Audrey and to be in control of the situation when the mother enters the community. Ironically, while everyone, including the mother, expects Flora to be the one whom Robert will marry after Ellie dies, he marries Audrey this time around. "Maybe now they'll be able to get married. Is she too old to start a family? How old is she, anyway? My mother thought that this was a crude way of talking about Flora and replied that she didn't know. But she had to admit to herself that she had been thinking the very same thing" (14-15). The fact that the community tries to justify Flora's "not being chosen by Robert" by her becoming "old and unattractive" shows their deep belief in all a woman is ever meant to

be in this community is a wife and a mother. The community concludes that if Robert does not choose Flora, it is probably because she is not young anymore and cannot bear children, hence her not being able to fulfill her so-called "womanly duties" in a male-centred social structure.

Flora, therefore, is constantly treated as a dysfunctional character by the two narrators, since she cannot be perceived as an independent individual without a man to shape her identity in her community. The mother once tells the narrator that she should have written Flora's story and should have called her "The Maiden Lady." She would have named the story after Flora, based on the fact that she was never married. However, once her mother later hears that Flora has moved to the city and is working, the narrator shares the same inability of even picturing Flora as she might be, living her life now in such a different way: "Would she get a permanent, paint her nails, put on lipstick?" (22). In other words, it is impossible for the mother or even her more contemporary daughter to picture Flora in a modern setting. As the hegemonic, predefining narratives suggest, then, a working woman is supposed to look a certain way, and it is difficult for them to label Flora's character and allow her to exist in different social positions in their stories of her life.

Moreover, the narrator as well as her mother are unable to see Flora's role in redefining her individuality in this community by focusing on Robert's destructive role in the story. The narrator further makes a point about how she blames Robert for Flora's story; although her account of the story has been told to her, his role has always been ignored. She blames Robert for what happens to Ellie and Flora, and at last to Audrey. Although it is a perfectly understandable argument, the way she states this denies any kind of agency to these women. What the narrator fails to recognize is that even if Robert is the one to blame for all

this, the only woman who has been able to resist him is Flora. She is the only woman around him who does not give in to the narratives or conform to the traditional roles of a woman and is able to reimagine her own identity at the end of the narrative by starting a life of her own.

In this story, although Flora does not seem to be in opposition to the community as she is an important figure in practicing the traditions, she is an outsider to the text itself. She is misunderstood not only by the mother and the narrator, but by the collective judgmental voice, which is heard throughout the story commenting on the actions. "The story of Flora and Ellie and Robert has been told—or all that people knew of it—in various versions [...] everybody said that Flora had behaved like a saint. Even when she went to extremes, as in dividing up the house—that was like a saint" (7-8). The text constructs Flora's character through others' judgments. She is supposed to be a "saint" because others could only explain her behaviour through categorizing her as such, and the mother does not seem to oppose this idea, while the narrator goes further to argue that Flora is not a saint but instead a "witch."

The narrator's use of derogatory terms to describe Flora's character, therefore, reveals the ironic similarity of her tendency to that of her mother's: "What made Flora evil in my story was just what made her admirable in my mother's—her turning away from sex [...] it's as if tendencies that seem most deeply rooted in our minds, most private and singular, have come in as spores on the prevailing wind, looking for any likely place to land, any welcome" (20). The text foregrounds the impossibility of the existence of one true story in that a story retold is a new story. The narrator is, in a way, confessing to the fact that everyone is defining Flora, in one way or another, and that no account could be trusted:

> I had my own ideas about Flora's story. I didn't think that I could have written a novel but that I would write one. I would take a different tack. I saw through my mother's story and put in what she let out. My Flora would be as black as hers was white. Rejoicing in the bad turns done to her and in her own forgiveness, spying on the shambles of her sister's life. A Presbyterian witch, reading out of her poisonous book. It takes a rival ruthlessness, the comparatively innocent brutality of the thick-skinned nurse, to drive her back, to flourish in her shade. (18-19)

Thus, the narrator also seems confined to thinking of Flora as either an angel or a witch. She is not able to see her as an ordinary person with ideas and a life of her own. She herself becomes the main character in her account of the story. If Flora is not revengeful, then she should have a dark side hidden from everyone. According to the narrator, these are the only ways Flora could be described, since no one seems to know anything about Flora's reality. This is precisely why the story takes a surprising turn towards the end when they find out that Flora has started a very ordinary life for herself. She is leading her life like any other independent working woman.

Based on the mother's and daughter's takes on the story of Flora, a conventional and self-sacrificing religious woman, this is a piece of information that neither seems able to process. The last letter her mother receives tells her that Flora has moved to town and has started a new life of her own. The first thing that is unsettling to her mother about this is that the only thing she used to identify Flora is absent from her letter: "An unsettling letter, leaving so many things out. Nothing in it about God's will or His role in our afflictions. No mention of whether Flora still went to that church" (21) which ultimately denies both their interpretations

and reconstructions of Flora's story. Once it is no longer possible for her to characterize Flora through her religious affiliation, the character's social identity is lost and incomprehensible to her.

Elliot observes that Munro's stories "describe our very inability to see ourselves through other people's eyes [...] to confirm utterly to the mask others have applied to our faces" (57). Although the narrator belongs to a different generation with a potentially different perception of women's social position and their modern roles, she acknowledges that the unexpected way Flora lives her life is not justifiable to her, since she can neither communicate with her character nor define her within the predefined female roles in her community.

While the mother and the narrator do not seem to understand nor support Flora's change of social position, Flora is the only one who has been able to go against the dominant narratives of her community and change her way of life; a change which is so great that it subverts everyone's assumption about her. The way the story ends is suggestive of the mixed feelings the narrator has about Flora. She ends the story by narrating a short anecdote about Cameronians. While the readers are not told about their practices and beliefs in the text, it is told that "their name comes from Richard Cameron, an outlawed, or 'field' preacher, soon cut down [...] one of their ministers, in a mood of firm rejoicing at his own hanging, excommunicated all the other preachers in the world" (24). The character in this anecdote relates on a deeper level to Flora's situation and the way she tries to neglect all the narratives and institutions to establish an identity of her own and legitimize her own individuality. By ending the story with this tale, the text implicitly also emphasizes the function

of Flora's religious beliefs in helping her choose her path that went against others' expectations, which is a correlation contrary to what the two different stories offer.

However, contrary to others' attempts to label Flora and identify her motives in the story, her evolved character at the end of the text seems to have confused and surprised the mother and the narrator: they cannot find any links between their impression of her religious affiliation and consequent expectations, on one hand, and her more recent transformation into a modern working woman, on the other. For instance, contrary to the narrator's expectations, Flora's religious beliefs do not seem to prevent her from changing the course of her life. She might even feel empowered by her distinctive beliefs and feel encouraged to take a "different tack," while this is not an account of the story told by any of the storytellers.

Munro's "Friend of My Youth" does not allow the central narrative's female characters' voices to be heard directly; however, in doing so it voices out the very same struggles women face in contemporary societies: It is not possible for women to be able to truly express themselves unless their voices can be heard directly. In its indirect representations of Ellie, Audrey, Flora, and even the narrator's mother, the text manifests the impossibility of hearing the female character's voice directly in its contemporary community. Moreover, by choosing a female narrative point of view in this story, Munro is hinting at the inevitability of the narrator's perspective being tinged by the dominant misogynistic narratives. The narrator's voice running over the different voices in the story also suggests the others' role in their attempts to define the female character's identity.

3.6. Telling Stories as Strategies for Women (Writers) to Speak to Their Communities

By focusing on issues such as representation and storytelling in the case studies, this chapter emphasizes the roles of both the storyteller and the narratee as potential agents for change. As Delgado suggests, “[F]eminist narrative scholars have attributed to storytelling the potential to disrupt entrenched ways of seeing and provoke consideration of phenomena that defy familiar narratives” (941). Therefore both texts foreground storytelling to emphasize different roles these agents can take to express and/or reshape their reality.

The stories Mehrangiz tells have a direct influence on the identity formation of children around her: as a result of the repetition of her stories, her main narrattee and a male character, Ali, is able to see the world from a very different perspective. It is through her stories that Ali, alongside the text's implied readers, learn about Mehrangiz's past, as a woman and an underprivileged member of the community. Moreover, the children, as the next generation, hear about her aspirations for a future in which her social position is in turn above others. In her marginalized social condition, Mehrangiz is able to express her truth solely in the form of her stories, in an alternative social space that she creates removed from her social reality yet depicted realistically.

The intricate relationship between the storyteller and her narratees is also emphasized in Munro’s "Friend of My Youth." While the nature and form of Flora's story is inconsistent and variable throughout the course of the story, the two different accounts show the significance of point of view in the way a story is narrated and/or interpreted. The first version of the story is presented from the point of view of the deceased mother of the narrator and contains a great deal of ambiguity and gaps. Building upon her mother's narrative, the main narrator of the

story twists the character of Flora even further. As the main point of view and focalizer of the story, the daughter's confession-like ending of the story highlights her indispensable role in telling the story as the first layer of narration in the text. In addition to the two narrators, Flora's story gains a life of its own and could be heard from in between the lines, as her story proves to be illusive and incapable of being captured in an ultimate form and interpretation.

After all, Beauvoir emphasizes that it is through these alternative individual practices, and social representations, that women can begin to have a self of their own: “Perhaps the myth of woman [as naturally submissive other] will someday be extinguished; the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvellous quality of the Other will die out in them” (174), and this is how the representations of female experience can emerge and can be more seriously recognized by others, generation after generation. Perhaps the possibility for women to express or reimagine their identities is not in a “city like paradise,” a neverland, but in alternative forms of social reality. The unpresentable image of the female individuals could perhaps be imagined and reimagined over and over again, through different perspectives and different generations of women storytellers.

Chapter 4: Connecting Women's Experiences Beyond Social Narratives

Comparing and contrasting women's writings across borders in the previous chapters highlights shared experiences of women in their patriarchal social structures. Studying such diverse sites of women's struggles side by side foregrounds women's shared patterns of social vulnerabilities and strengths. These conversational spaces are much needed in moving toward more inclusive feminist agendas that would recognize women's unique struggles in their specific communities while suggesting ways to bring these forms of struggle closer to one another. As Uma Narayan in her article "Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism" suggests, "Today, feminist scholars need methodological tools that will enable us to avoid cultural essentialism and explore in ways that are respectful of how people organize and create meaning in their lives" (197), and comparative studies of this kind can

contribute to this significant cause by following a specific theme across different cultures. Transnational studies of women's writings enable contemporary feminist scholars to recognize different forms of expression and experiences of women around the world not in a hierarchical but rather parallel way.

Therefore, a transnational study of sites of women's expressions and experiences has the potential to help contemporary communities in better identifying and addressing women's issues in their larger multicultural societies being formed around the globe. As Narayan observes, "[I]n an era of increasing integration, the local and the global are inseparable, though they are not reducible to each other, and feminist researchers must find ways of exploring each in the context of the other" (197). Thus, creating and maintaining such transnational spaces seems necessary as a strategy to identify diverse expressions of women and create points of interaction between them. The case studies provided in this dissertation, including the ones in this chapter, offer a reading strategy that is applicable to a host of contemporary women's writings concerned with female character's attempts in dealing with the social demands of community and exercising agency in reimagining her identity through her storytelling.

The following texts are added here to determine if and how this reading strategy applies to other instances of contemporary women's writings. The applicability of this strategy is very important as a main objective of my project, which is to bring together and contribute to the ongoing conversations between diverse representations of women's expressions. Moreover, a cross-examination of this reading strategy and different texts belonging to narratives of community genre confirms my initial argument that similar patterns of hegemonizing and

resistance exists beyond borders regarding representing women's identity formations in their social position and their strategies to deal with and challenge them.

In Chapter 1, I outlined the theoretical framework of my study. I identified transnational feminisms as ideal platforms which bring women's diverse yet interrelated forms of expression and experience together. Transnational feminism provides an inclusive space where all these different forms can meet, engage in conversations, share, and learn from these experiences in order to highlight common patterns of patriarchal communities and women's social issues in their interactions with them. The meeting point of transnational feminisms and the study of narratives and language games is where I define my reading strategy in this dissertation.

I further highlighted the prevalent role of Zagarell's idea of narratives of community in the case studies in the second chapter. These texts, as instances of narratives of community, depict the life of a central female character in her everyday interactions with different social communities. To do so, I identified social institutions and rules in these communities, and examined the extent to which the female character can challenge them and reimagine her womanhood. Moreover, this chapter investigated how the central character in all the case studies, *The Bell,* "Princess Ida"*,* and *Savushun,* are able to change not only her own social position but also affect others' lives around them in their community.

Chapter 3 illustrated how storytelling can function as a liberatory strategy where the female character is able to use the communities' language games in fabricating her own little narratives in order to break free from the gendered narratives of her community. The two stories, "A City like Paradise" and "Friend of My Youth," showcase storytellers in their communities in the forms and processes they tell and re-tell their stories. Moreover, as an

important aspect of storytelling, the roles of the narrator and the narratee were foregrounded through analyzing different narrative layers of the texts.

In this final chapter, in an attempt to show how the reading strategy offered in my research is applicable to a myriad of different texts in contemporary women's writings, I will examine female characters' subjectivity formation in two other texts, Zoya Pirzad's *Things We Left Unsaid* and Bjørg Vik's "Out of Season." While *Things We Left Unsaid* portrays the central character in her immediate Armenian-Iranian and larger Iranian community, "Out of Season" juxtaposes the lives of two women, a Norwegian traveler and a Romanian, who cross paths in Post-Communist Romania. It is also important to acknowledge that both texts are instances of narratives of community, which, as introduced and analyzed in this study, depict the ways their female characters reimagine their identities. By depicting the hegemonic narratives that predefine them based on their gender, these women often subvert the norms and fabricate their own individual narratives.

In addition to these texts being narratives of community, the female character's complex position in these narratives determines the way she confronts her community's hegemonic narratives. It is through the differences between these characters' social positions that the significance of storytelling as a tool can be further examined. As Michael N. Lafrance and Suzanne McKenzie-Mohr suggest, "finding means to attune our collective ears to more complex and nuanced alternatives is necessary for emergent counter-stories to effectively challenge hegemony" (11). Therefore, the spaces created in these texts depict the different ways characters are affected by their individual challenges in experiencing gendered narratives

and dealing with their social institutions. As a result, the way they deploy stories and the form their stories take to reimagine their identities is different.

This difference in the way of portraying the female character's social position, community structure, and connection to stories and counter stories is crucial when similar patterns arise in comparative analyses of texts from different geographic points. These patterns indicate the prevalence of over-arching experiences and struggles of women that connect them beyond cultures and languages. In addition to these similarities, the nuances highlight the need for more inclusive scholarship, where instances of women's attempts to challenge and change their own stories as well as the homogenizing master narratives can be examined.

The case studies in this chapter highlight one aspect of the challenges that the female character deals with in addition to their struggles regarding their social position as women. Clarice, the central character in Pirzad's *Things We Left Unsaid,* is a housewife belonging to the Arminian-Iranian community as a minority group in Abadan, Iran. Thus, the challenges the female character feels as a woman in search of her identity are at times more than merely attempts to fit in the larger community but are ways to redefine her personal relationships and social position between the two. Different challenges could also be seen in Ileana's character in Vik's "Out of Season" in that as a result of internal conflicts, she does not feel a sense of belonging with her fellow citizens in addition to her womanhood, as a marginalized experience in her patriarchal social structure. The narrator's initial superior sense of self, therefore, becomes another negative textual space, which highlights Ileana's challenges in her community and further shatters the narrator's false assumptions about their superficial differences.

Pirzad's *Things We Left Unsaid* depicts the life of and is narrated from the perspective of a middle-class woman in her thirties in Abadan, Iran in the 1960s, a time of political changes leading to the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Through her interactions with other characters and her own perceptions, Clarice, the central character of the narrative, is constantly in search of her identity as a woman. Realizing her own lack of selfhood, her new social milieu influences her to such a degree that "gradually and sometimes painfully, her political and social consciousness awakens, as the society around her is riven with cataclysmic upheavals" (P. W.), so that she experiences her awakening through socio-economic changes in the society's move to modernization. The protagonist's interactions with other characters pose sharp contrasts between her perceived image of herself and those of others, and the image she would like to project, as an independent woman.

Vik's "Out of Season" portrays the interaction of the narrator who meets another middle-aged woman during her trip to Romania. The text highlights the women's different attitudes and the narrator's perceptions of her Romanian travel companion, Ileana. Gradually, however, a series of events leads to her becoming closer to Ileana and sympathizing with her to an extent that Ileana ceases to be the different, strange "other" woman. Like many of her stories, Vik portrays common struggles of women around the world and their ability to connect and share their pains beyond cultural and linguistic boundaries. As Carla Waal suggests, Vik's texts "[present] life as it is so that readers experience a shock of recognition and deepened understanding of themselves and their world" (220), a bold feature of this short story which is in line with the concerns of this chapter: by portraying the interactions of central female

characters with others—usually women as well—Vik is able to communicate the social interactions where official and unofficial narratives about femininity are highlighted.

The other point worth noting is the different forms these two texts: a novel and a short story. While a novel tends to give a more holistic image of the life of a character in the presence of others in her community, a short story often depicts the specific condition of one or two characters. Therefore, in each case study, a different depiction of characters in their community, as well as various forms of storytelling will be examined. While the presence o others in *Things We Left Unsaid,* as a novel*,* gives a plausible image of Pirzad's experience and her perception of the dynamics of her social structure as a minority woman writer in Iran, the focus on the relationship between the two female characters in "Out of Season," as a short story, highlights the value of the two women's connection.

In addition to providing support for the applicability of the reading strategy, the two texts are set in more multinational and diverse communities where confrontations with different cultural narratives is another challenge the characters face. *Things We Left Unsaid* depicts a slice of a woman's life in a closed immediate family where to be accepted by her family and friends she needs to follow the rules and embody the gendered narratives around her. Her awakening comes at a time when, in order to find a more active social position for herself, she has to abandon her family and find a way to reimagine her identity.

"Out of Season" also presents the readers with the feminist awakening of the narrator that takes place as a result of her meeting a woman from another culture. It is through this meeting that the Norwegian woman learns her experience as a woman is not that different from her Romanian counterpart. Through a troubling interaction with two men that are

travelling in the same train car, many of their shared issues and fears surface as women living in a man's world. The extent to which the narrator is able to identify with the other woman's experience teaches her how the main roots of women's experiences in their patriarchal communities are similar when the arbitrary national differences are lifted, however momentarily. In the following two readings, the two texts will be examined to see what social issues the writers are foregrounding and how these readings respond to the use of storytelling by characters and their communities.

4.1. My Life Is Hanging by a Story: Zoya Pirzad's *Things We Left Unsaid*

The central character in *Things We Left Unsaid*, Clarice, is portrayed as a traditional wife and mother who is constantly subjected to the voices of social norms coming from her community. She is troubled by the fact that her husband is not as attentive to her anymore, her children are growing up and she has started to feel she is not serving a purpose in her own life. However, she is unable to communicate her feelings so that the reader hears about them from her perspective. As a subject of her community, she feels powerless in maintaining the version of her life that she desires while trying to live up to what the community standards for her as a woman. In other words, towards the beginning of the novel she appears as a storyteller who feels she has no more stories to tell, or to live by, and is desperately in need of an alternative narrative of her own that can keep her sane and allow her to carry on with her life.

Throughout the story, Clarice is trying to find bits and pieces of her lost self in everyone around her and in their relationships with her. This struggle is reflected in the differences in between her words and actions: this duality is mainly seen in the way she strives to have another role other than being a housewife and how she is hesitant to take up the

opportunities that are presented to her. Torn between tradition and modernity, she wishes for a more independent and passionate life, yet she embodies traditional definitions of femininity and plays out others' expected roles of her as a woman. Throughout the text, this splitting of the self is shown through her two "streaks[22]": the one that reveals how she feels as an individual in different contexts, and the other who is trying to make her abide by the rules and institutions that can define her as an "acceptable" woman and makes her conform to social norms around her.

While Clarice is acutely aware of her family members' comments on her actions that seem to deny her a chance to live her own story, her internalization of these social norms in the text is seen in her own perceptions of motherhood and being a housewife. Her mother and her sister, Alice, are the voices of tradition and representatives of the dominant community of women she is surrounded by in the story who represent conventional characteristics of a woman for Clarice. For instance, throughout the story, bits and pieces of her interest in reading and translation are revealed, and when Artoush asks her why she does not work as a translator anymore, he is confronted by Clarice's mom's reaction that Clarice has no time for such things and that "it's been six months since she washed the bedroom curtains" (85). Her mother, as the voice of tradition, is clearly opposed to the idea of Clarice working. This is likely because she wants to protect her from what she might consider a criticism on the part of Artoush and to

[22] As translated by Franklin Lewis. In many parts, the protagonist refers to her two different "streaks" as two different sides of her, the one who is in line with the social conventions and the other who is finding her own voice in the story.

validate her own position as a conventional woman who has never stopped wearing black, even decades after her husband's death.

Frustrated with the social pressure she feels in conforming to her traditional role as a woman, what Clarice quite ironically fails to recognize, however, is her own participation in carrying out the social norms she rejects. Clarice, as well as other female characters in the story, is a subject and participant of the patriarchal values of her community. By projecting these conventions to others, and demonizing them, she manages to repudiate herself from them while she herself follows them. This example toward the beginning of the novel embodies her attitude: “I remembered the day I told my mother and my sister Alice, ‘I hate women who wear an apron from morning to night just so that people will think they are good homemakers. A woman is more than just a homemaker [thinking of her mother] and she should not dress up just to please others [thinking of Alice]” (18, *brackets mine*). While we learn about the conventional practices of women around her in this example, we see her tendency to separate her own experience as a woman from those of her mother and her sister.

This remark is particularly ironic since at the time she remembers this conversation, she is herself the woman wearing the “apron” in search of her story. The answer she is given by her mother emphasizes that she shares such attitudes with “other” women Clarice tries to distinguish herself from: “So that’s how it is, is it? So a woman should just live her life and do everything for herself? [...] So why do your lips quiver with disappointment when Artoush doesn’t notice you are wearing a new dress, or that you’ve gone to the hairdresser, or put flowers on the table?” (19) Unable to escape the social narratives of her community and feeling victimized in her social situation, she blames everyone else for her

inability to live her desired story and is unable to see her own role in adhering to the rules. Throughout the novel, she seems lost, not knowing what her true story is, and not knowing which way to take, and by being a meek follower, she treats her sister in the same way. She shares her mother's exact thoughts and critiques of Alice's periodic infatuations with men and harshly criticizes her fixation on finding a husband.

For instance, when Alice comes to tell them about her recent encounter, Clarice and her mother communicate without the need to speak about the matter: "[M]other looked at me and shook her head. We both knew by heart the sequence of events that would next transpire. Whenever an unmarried man turned up, Alice first got a new hair-do and then she went on a diet, for a few days or a few weeks, depending upon how long the infatuation lasted" (71). She can see and analyze her sister's behaviour in encountering unmarried men while she is unable to see her own role, also as a woman, in separating her own experience from her sister's and not engaging in an honest conversation with her. The irony presented in the way Clarice sees her own situation as different from that of her sister and mother could also be justified by Linda Alcoff's observation that,

> [i]n speaking for myself, I am also representing myself in a certain way, as occupying a specific subject-position […] I (momentarily) create my self—just as much as when I speak for others I create their selves—in the sense that I create a public, discursive self, which will in most cases have an effect on the self experienced as interiority. (10)

Thus, a self is constructed by the very thinking/speaking subject who is also able to construct selves for others, in a similar process. In other words, in both speaking for one's self and others, as Alcoff suggests, a self is constructed by the subject. Clarice's consciousness,

therefore, is unable to experience and analyze her own at times incompatible thoughts and actions, her own conformity to those narratives she criticizes, and the way she can easily see them in the other women around her. Even when she becomes aware of the other in herself, she is not able to reconcile the two selves: "[T]he unrelenting critical streak challenged me again: 'since when do we ever talk about the things we like?' My generous side searched for a counter-response" (172). The two voices in her mind could be regarded as the representative of social norms and her own desires, respectively. However, in trying to think of these two voices, she is not willing to categorize herself in the same way she does when she constructs the selves of her mother or her sister. This way, she sees herself as different from the other women in the text according to similar criteria by which she is perceived as the other woman by them.

Her double standards regarding Alice's conformity to community become more ironic when she herself starts to feel a desire to distance herself from her traditional roles as a wife and a mother, have an affair with another man, and become free of the social narratives she feels have paralyzed her. In addition, the metanarrative in the story that has made her act—or not act—in this way comes from her deceased father. Her father's advice is the symbolic voice of the patriarchal community that constantly prevents her from going against the grain or behaving in ways that would elicit the disapproval of others. His expectation of her is introduced toward the beginning of the novel: "[I] remembered how father would say 'don't argue with anyone and don't criticize them. Whatever anyone tells you, just say 'you are right' and let it go. When people ask your opinion about something, they are not really interested in what you believe. They want you to agree with them. Arguing with people is pointless" (32). This piece of advice is an unwritten rule that makes her question her

natural tendency to speak her mind and break away from her limitations. Thus, reminding herself of this piece of advice discourages her from engaging in any kind of conflict with her husband, mother, and sister. This advice from her father is the manifestation of a patriarchal narrative in the story, or as Jacque Lacan calls it, “the Law of the Father.”

This social narrative is first challenged when Clarice overhears a public talk on the women’s rights movement given by her husband's secretary, Mrs. Nourollahi. Although Clarice fails to actively challenge patriarchal narratives herself and rejects Mrs. Nourollahi’s invitation to get involved in her feminist agenda, she feels a deep connection to the ideas Mrs. Nourollahi discusses regarding women’s issues. She does not comment on the consequences of getting involved with this activist group directly; however, her involvement would be frowned upon by other women and once again, she goes on to silence her curious side. While she is offered the chance to take on a more active social role in her community, she cannot accept out of fear that her immediate community, in the form of her family and the Armenian community, will not approve.

Mrs. Nourollahi’s character poses a sharp contrast to Clarice and complicates her already ambivalent personal story of herself as a woman in the text. The first time Mrs. Nourollahi’s name is mentioned, she is introduced based on her “capabale”ness by Artoush. When Clarice quite accidentally hears Mrs. Nourollahi’s delivering the lecture, Clarice compares her state as a housewife with that of hers in that “Mrs. Nourollahi was a capable woman. I knew she was married, with three children. Like me. Despite that, she was working, and was involved in social activism, too. What did I do beside housework?” (82). Clarice is quite dissatisfied with her constrained predefined roles as mother

and housewife and wishes for some change in her ordinary life and a space where she could also contribute to social changes happening in her community.

When Clarice is approached by Mrs. Nourollahi to join the group, it becomes quite apparent that Clarice believes in and admires women's causes. This is particularly true when Clarice is invited to a meeting of Muslim women as a representative of Armenian women. "[She] wanted to invite Armenian women to attend the meetings of their society. 'The problems of women apply to all women, it's not a Muslim or Armenian [Christian] issue. Women must join together, arm in arm, and solve their problems. They must teach one another and learn from each other" (221). However, Clarice is reluctant to become actively involved in the committee for fear of being criticized and labeled an unconventional woman by her own family.

Clarice's belonging to a minority ethnic group, Armenian-Iranian in Iran, could be another issue that causes her to withdraw from a socio-political involvement. It is implied by the text that Clarice is a second or third generation Armenian-Iranian woman whose ancestors immigrated to Iran in the mid-1890s. The fact that Ms. Nourollahi, a native Iranian and Muslim woman, is in charge of the women's empowerment movement could be one reason Clarice does not feel affiliated with and declines her offer to join the group. Ms. Nourollahi is the only non-Armenian woman that appears in the text, which indicates that the community to which Clarice feels most attached is Armenian-Iranian rather than the Iranian community at large. Clarice's involvement with the movement, therefore, could jeopardize her social status in her Armenian community and presents her with another community to which she does not feel she belongs. As discussed in Chapter 2, "home" and

"foreign" languages games can be seen in this text as well. Whereas home language games are manifested in Armenian conventions as practiced by the other women and the larger set of language games is represented through the Iranian culture that affect her life and experience as an Armenian-Iranian woman.

Clarice does not feel that she is an insider in the larger community. Although she seems very interested in the speech and desperately wishes to change her social condition, it is almost as if she does not have the permission, as a member of the dominant community to join the group, or in Alcoff's words, "cannot assume an ability to transcend one's location" (6-7) on her own. Clarice's ambivalence is indicative of her significant position as a woman in her community: as the central character in this story, she is dissatisfied with the status quo and needs to be more, and do more, as an individual, yet she is bound to encounter numerous obstacles on her way. She feels inadequate compared to Mrs. Nourollahi, who seems to have figured out both personal and social aspects of her life as a woman. While feeling the need to step out of the traditional box of her life as a woman, she is unable to make the jump, and face the imminent criticisms of her family and friends.

Yet, Clarice's ray of hope to fabricate her desired story comes into being by the arrival of the new neighbors. She is instantly taken in by the attention she receives from Emil, which provides her with a social space, hidden from everyone else, which she can have to herself. It is right after her first meeting with their mysterious new neighbors that she comes to the realization that she has, in fact, turned into a conventional woman: "I looked at my hands. At my close-clipped and unpolished nails. When I shook hands, did Mrs. Simonian notice how chapped my hands were? What about her son?" (57). Her chapped hands become a tangible

way for her to see herself as the ideal image of a woman that her male-oriented community upholds and realize that in being an ordinary housewife, she cannot conform to the predefined patriarchal narratives, either. Her inability to embody the ideal image of a woman either as a housewife or the "desirable" woman, and being seen as an average traditional woman, threatens her sense of self and causes worry about others' constructed selves for her.

Because of her conversations with Emil and her strong feelings for him, she is able to see herself differently, but she is still trapped between her community's narratives of being a beautiful, desirable woman, or a traditional and unambitious housewife. She finds the story she is looking for in order to get out of her ordinary life through her acquaintance with Emil. For instance, when Emil kisses instead of shaking her hand, which is quite surprising both to her and Artoush, she feels in charge of her story again. Not only does Emil's attention deeply touch her in this first get-together, it also suddenly awakens her to what has become of her since she last thought of her own needs and desires. It is as if she is seeing herself from the view point of another person—from a view point of a man and adhering to a patriarchal narrative—an admirer, for the first time in a long time, which makes it a perfect fit for a new story, an adventure that she craves.

Clarice, as the story shows, does not get to have a lot of time to herself apart from her life as a housewife. She seeks some role other than that of unadventurous mother and wants something other than constantly "think[ing] about daily chores like fixing dinner, getting Armen to study, Artoush's forgetfulness, and indifference" (65). In other words, her role as a mother and wife does not leave her any space to be with herself and her inner thoughts and emotions. Her occasional smoking, when no one is around, is the only time she gets to herself to "sit by

the window in the green leather armchair, lean back, puff, and think [...] in these rare moments of solitude" (65). She craves some time to herself to think, say, and do what she desires, but cannot find it in her position as a housewife. It is in this context that she gets involved in this one-sided emotional relationship with Emil, even if it would make her the object of criticism from her family or community.

Thus, simple remarks by Emil such as "Clarice, can I lend a hand?" (99) at her small dinner party, or his coming to her to consult her on different occasions become cornerstones in making up her infatuation: as she sees Emil more, she feels certain that they are falling in love with one another. She starts to have a constant mental struggle with herself as to how to read his actions and words: "Was it his offer of help, or his calling me by my first name, that made me happy?" (99). While she is often touched by kind gestures such as this one from Emil, something she rarely gets from her husband, she is morally conflicted in allowing herself to feel happy and complimented.

It is, therefore, significant to note how both of these images are manifestations of the prescribed narratives of being a woman in a patriarchal social structure. Ironically, the moment she feels embarrassed by her image as a housewife is the time she does not resemble the predefined image of "the beautiful woman," which shows her confinement as a female character in the web of normative (dominant) narratives of her community. In contrast, Emil's interest in her is another manifestation of dominance of patriarchal narratives in her social structure, which makes her get in touch with a part of herself that she seems to have forgotten. Through her infatuation with him, she gives space to her own desires in that it shifts

her focus away from her conventional life as a housewife. It is through this shift in focus that she is able to reimagine her social position in her community.

Clarice seems to find a way to rediscover herself through her one-sided infatuation with Emil and seems to be playing the gendered language game in which, in order to define her identity, she needs to be in a relationship with a man. However, this emotional involvement with Emil is no more than a trigger for her subconscious to change her story, while the writer plays with the readers' expectations. As Clarice, as well as the readers, soon realize, there is nothing more than a friendship between them from Emil's perspective. While, she initially seems disappointed in the lost possibility, her infatuation with him proves to be just another narrative element in the new story she is writing for herself. In other words, Clarice is using normative language games to create a space in her position to reimagine her identity beyond normativity.

Clarice's reimagination of her identity after her encounter with Emil is an example for Kristeva's idea of "ethical practice," which she introduces in her *The Revolution in Poetic Language.* She states that "the specific problematic of writing breaks decisively with myth and representation to think itself in its literality and its space. Its practice is to be defined on the level of the 'text'" (232), in that it is only through writing, or in this case, *rewriting* that representation can take a new form. "Ethics" in this concept, Kristeva adds, "should be understood here to mean the negativizing of narcissism within a *practice;* In other words, a practice is ethical when it dissolves those narcissistic fixations […] to which the signifying process succumbs in its socio-symbolic realization" (233). Therefore, the text, as an artistic whole, foregrounds the impact of storytelling and the shift that happens through it in Clarice's

subjectivity as a result of being set against her community as the negative space Kristeva suggests.

Keltner suggests that it is the "*concrete transformation* of a subject and meaning within a particular social-symbolic code of communication," which is characterized *"*by disturbing one's sense of self" (36). Through this connection, which feels private and untouchable by anyone else, Clarice finds another hidden side of herself and is able to experience a transformation in the way she views herself and others. Her ordinary life becomes more meaningful and tolerable by moments of ethical practice where she shares this private experience with Emil. This private experience, however transient and unrequited, provides the emotional space within herself to rewrite her story.

Moreover, the novel is narrated from the first person's point of view, which makes the readers believe in the possibility of a love affair between the two: the readers become aware of every word that she hears, and everything that she thinks, so that prior to Emil's behaviour, her point of view becomes the source of validity for the events and characterization of the story. Familiar with the unwritten rules and facing the narratives of patriarchal communities themselves, readers will not have any difficulty in believing the possibility of an affair; for instance, in the scene where Clarice and Emil are alone discussing a matter and she feels drawn to Emil, a locust rain interrupts their encounter; by adding a biblical narrative layer to the story, the readers, who had believed the relationship to be mutual, see this scene as a foreshadowing of a grave punishment that awaits Clarice for her forbidden fantasy.

Towards the end of the story, however, readers as well as Clarice, are snapped out of her daydream by learning that Emil is in fact in love with a relative of Clarice's friend, when he

comes to consult her on the matter. Ironically, it is right after this shock that her personal crisis seems to resolve. She is a different person even when she finds out that the family has moved out of their neighborhood overnight. Her interactions with her family seem to have improved and she seems to feel more in control of her life, having given herself this space to engage in her fantasy. The encounters with Emil provide Clarice with an emotional space—apart from her life as a mother and a housewife—to see herself as an individual. Thus, at the end of the novel, Clarice feels transformed by making her stories in the face of dominant narratives that used to define her.

Her story, while a made-up one (similar to the ones she tells her daughters and worries that they will grow out of soon just like her son), creates the space for her to feel free from her obligations of being a full-time wife and mother, and imagine an alternative narrative for herself. As Molly Hite puts it "the silencing of female attempts to articulate an 'other-side' to the dominant stories of a given culture is never complete, in that this 'side' is not in any absolute sense unimaginable or inconceivable" (3). Although she is surrounded by different forms of narratives in her community that seem to direct her toward her traditional roles as a woman, it is her imagination that cannot be tamed. At the end of the story, she may appear to be where she was at the beginning, but this experience has set both Clarice and the readers free of those mental struggles. She has found the space in herself to dream, to fantasize, and to make up her own alternative reality. Her fantasized affair with Emil and her determination to move on proves to her that she is the one in charge of her life and story, and she moves from being an object of desire to an individual who can redefine her position.

Clarice prefers to make up her own personal narrative in order to challenge her community's narratives around women's social position and identity. Challenging the gendered and familial narratives happens through the female character's realization of her agency in taking charge of and speaking for herself. As Alcoff suggests, "when I speak for myself, I am constructing a possible self, a way to be in the world, and am offering that to others, whether I intend to or not, as one possible way to be […] When I 'speak for myself' I am participating in the creation and reproduction of discourses through which my own and other selves are constituted" (21). Therefore, Clarice seems determined to redefine her identity, which is emblematic of the transformation of the contemporary woman in Pirzad's contemporary society. She finds a way to fabricate counter-narratives of her own as a first significant step to challenge her gendered social structure. While her outward social position has not changed dramatically by the end of the novel, her more optimistic attitude indicates that she has become aware of her internal power to reimagine her identity.

4.2. Women Are the Storytellers of the World: Bjørg Vik's "Out of Season"

Vik depicts female characters' power of imagination in her "Out of Season" (1983) by blurring the borderlines of self and other through the two central characters' shared traumatic experience. Moreover, in this story, Vik foregrounds the necessity of women's connecting their shared yet various experiences of patriarchy beyond borders. The author tells this story, in order to not merely speak for another, but to speak for women's shared struggles coming from various social structures. Throughout the course of the story, the narrator learns about the arbitrariness of national differences and the value in sharing another woman's pain and fear, regardless of where she comes from, what she looks like and the language she speaks.

The female character's transformation of self is depicted in this story through the interactions of two women who cross paths on a train to Constanta, Romania: a Norwegian tourist who is the narrator of the story and Ileana, a native of the country on a business trip. The interactions of these two women with one another and with two men they encounter on the train is the focus of the text. Whereas Ileana happens to run into many instances of socially degrading and at times, life-threatening situations with men, the narrator is only a witness to the events or the listener to her stories. During the course of the story, the narrator views Ileana, who based on the narrator's first impression looks "typically Rumanian, with high breasts, short legs, short fingers, black hair and several chins" (86), as an other. Towards the end of the story, however, the narrator turns into someone who sympathizes with Ileana's experiences and fears, which confirm her assumptions of a patriarchal world.

The narrator's tendency to categorize Ileana as belonging to a specific group of women based on her appearance is in accordance with patriarchal values that determine what it means to be a woman. Based on Ileana's anatomical features and her bold make-up, the narrator's stereotypical impressions of her are seemingly confirmed by the suggestion that she must have "no children," since she eats so freely (87). While there is no direct link between being a childless woman and eating freely, the narrator easily makes these connections since she is convinced of the validity of this narrative that a woman who has children does not act in a carefree manner.

Although the narrator tends to distance herself from Ileana based on her constructed stereotypical image of her as a typical Romanian woman at the beginning of the story, she shares an interest with her in labeling the women in a magazine Ileana shows her, such as her

remarking that the princess is not exactly beautiful, but "looks very English" (87). The narrator's observations and comments on the way royal women look in this part of the story in addition to her constant evaluations of her travel companion is in line with Moi's idea that "patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for femininity are natural" (123). The shared attitudes of the two women in labeling the women in the magazine confirm the normalization of what it means to be beautiful based on national stereotypes. While she has also heard about and comments on the stories of royal families in which Ileana seems to be interested, she continues to see Ileana as the other by attributing all those patriarchal social constructs to her in order to distance herself from them. In other words, this Othering, which has its roots in her belonging to a different national identity than her counterpart, enables her to construct her own superior sense of self. Her unconscious superior feeling comes from a confirmation of patriarchal values regarding internalized stereotypical perceptions of women as well as men.

These cultural norms and value systems are depicted in the text through the narrator's impressions of Ileana's behaviour throughout the journey. For example, when it comes to the two women's interaction with the two young men who are sitting with them, the narrator behaves in a much more agreeable manner since she considers her social position different from that of Ileana. The two men, who are drunk and abusive towards their female companions, ask them to exchange some money. Ileana refuses to engage in a conversation with them, while the narrator chooses to give in to their request: “I changed fifty dollars with

the waiter[23], his rates were double those of the bank. Ileana pretended not to see us. I felt a little nervous. When he claimed that I had given him only forty-five dollars, not fifty, I quickly gave him five in order to get it over with" (88). While she recognizes that the men are taking advantage of her because she is a foreigner and a woman, she is unable to confront them, and not only does she acquiesce to their unfair rates, she also agrees to give them more money, for fear of getting into a fight with them.

As a result of these interactions, both women understand that they are being taken advantage of; however, their first instincts as how to react to the men's behaviour differ. Ileana first refuses to confront the abusive men, but then engages in a verbal fight with them while the narrator stays silent. The foregrounding of their nationalities and location in the story highlights their different attitudes in dealing with the same problem has its roots in their coming from different communities with specific cultural norms and value systems. These conflicting cultural norms lead Ileana to stand up for herself and react to the two men's inappropriate behaviour. Whereas her cultural-specific norms prevent the narrator from engaging in the verbal fight with the men—apparent in her passing judgment on them for fighting—Ileana's knowledge of her own cultural norms provides her with the space to defend herself by reporting the men to the train inspector. Thus, their mindsets regarding different cultural value systems cause the two women to behave differently.

While Ileana's different approach to standing up for herself temporarily puts an end to the abuse, it does not prevent her from feeling vulnerable in the face of her constrained social

[23] The narrator refers to him based on his profession in Constanta.

situation as a woman and an "outsider within" (Harding 336) her patriarchal society. This prescribed framework would demand that she avoid any chance of further confrontations in order to stay safe, whereas her choice to engage in the fight with the men denies her this safe mental state: after the verbal fight, Ileana reveals to the narrator that she feels threatened for being called "an enemy of the Rumanian people" and "a spy" (89) by the man; while this remark is groundless, she still feels threatened since in her post-communist socio-political setting, such an accusation could have a fatal consequence for her.

Moreover, her fear is accompanied by the man's threatening looks and reactions: "[N]ow and then the waiter would turn around and throw a contemptuous glare at Ileana's direction. […] the colour of Ileana's skin changed from red to violet. I could see she was sweating" (89). This is when the narrator starts to feel the other woman's fears and sympathize with her: a feeling that soon turns into empathy when Ileana tells her that the man called her "an old whore" and that he has threatened to "settle with [her] when [they] get to Constanta. His gypsy friends will help him" (90). While the narrator tries to keep Ileana calm, she shares her fear when Ileana tells her that the man is dangerous and has threatened her, based on her own underlying subconscious stereotypical perception.

The narrator starts to understand Ileana's situation once she witnesses her emotional struggles and pain when they alight the train and decide to run away together: "[W]e ran over the platforms, down the stairs, through the vestibule. She clung to me like some fat, frightened little dog" (90). While the way the narrator describes Ileana is problematic, she starts to share her fear as they get to the hotel where they "could dimly make out the figures of men on their way to or from some nameless crime in this ghost hotel" (91). Additional problems, such as

Ileana's door being jammed, having a strange man barge in the room, and having a man make a marriage proposal in an elevator, set Ileana into a frantic mode and position the narrator as her sole confidante and occasional saviour. That the narrator shares Ileana's fear and her similar perception of being insulted indicates that the patriarchal marginalization and the defined gender positions of women have been internalized across cultures.

The similar perception of these two characters regarding the remark about a woman's promiscuity as offensive is important in understanding how similar their perceptions of social narratives are. The narrator seems to be preoccupied with finding the reason for feeling insulted by any indication of promiscuity as well. It is interesting to her to realize "how men can offend [women] by making allusions to our sexuality, while the opposite is practically impossible. If anyone had told the man on the train that he was a goddamn whore he would have probably taken it as a compliment" (90). As the narrator clarifies, the heavily loaded concept of women's promiscuity, beyond its literal significance in different languages, is packed with double standards and different connotations when used for men and women. That both women reacted to the insult in the same way illustrates the possibility of a pre-verbal form of communication beyond a shared linguistic system.

The two characters' shared social experiences across cultures provide a space for connection between them. The narrator tries to console Ileana by telling her that this is "an old and well-tried insult […] men are always trying to offend us that way when they haven't anything better to do" (90). The narrator's attempt to identify this insult as something as old as patriarchy itself and that insulting women is considered a pastime for men prove to be

consoling to Ileana. In other words, as the target of abuse, they both seem to have learned to justify such behaviours in their patriarchal communities.

Furthermore, the narrator's remark affirms that such gendered experiences for women go beyond specific borders, languages or cultures, and that as Moi puts it, "location and positionality should be understood as multiple and shifting, not as a given essence" (143). Although the narrator comes from a different geographical location—and that allows her to see herself as different from Ileana—as a woman, she is able to identify with Ileana's fear. While the narrator constantly tries to view Ileana as different from her and cannot explain why these confrontations with men should be happening to her, that the narrator has no difficulty in believing these experiences *can* happen shows the widespread dominance of male-centred social narratives and sexist practices beyond borders. In addition, even though no physical assault happens in the story, the fear and the consequent sense of solidarity that these threats create in both women shows similar struggles that women face in their various social structures.

Towards the end of the story, the narrator is able to identify with Ileana as an abused and socially subjected woman who is conditioned within their particular geographical positions to constantly confirm the myths of being a woman: "I thought about Ileana, about how in all countries of the world women allow themselves to be insulted, and how we allow the insults to flood over us" (91). In using the more inclusive pronoun "we," she momentarily stops distancing herself from Ileana, and moves beyond the idea of self and Other in order to realize the applicability of such feelings and experiences of women of "all countries of the world" beyond any geographical borders:

> I thought of Ileana. Thought of all the Ileanas in the world, thirsting for love, fantasizing and stumbling in their own longings. Incredulously watching their more advanced sisters buying love with hard currency, while they themselves maybe got a little out of season adventure, after the pretty women had gone. It was not difficult to imagine Ileana. With the years […] she would become an eccentric old lady, and she would have countless stories to tell. (97)

Throughout this interaction with a woman coming from another culture, the female narrator gets a chance to step out of her own confining yet comfortable subjective space and to view herself alongside the “Ileanas of the world.” Through her feminist awakening, the narrator realizes that there are shared struggles for women in male-oriented communities, beyond borders, a realization which makes her feel closer to Ileana. She can see the larger patriarchal system in which she, just like Ileana—as her “more advanced sister”—is a player in a discriminatory social order not created by her. As Moi also suggests, one invisible function of patriarchy is “to imprison women in their subjectivity, thereby severely curtailing their freedom to transcend the narrow confines patriarchy has prepared for them” (155), and how it is through writing, listening to others' stories, and telling one's own that women are able to get out of this web, however momentarily, since “creativity requires the freedom to escape the given, the familiar, and the known as well as the freedom to return to it” (155). The ability and freedom to imagine is what is needed for women to challenge the rules of the game. However, the readers are reminded of the transience of this feeling, when the narrator hears "a mocking laughter clattered in the autumn evening" (Vik 97), which could be symbolic of the indifference of patriarchal agendas to painful gendered experiences of women worldwide.

4.3. Women Sharing Stories: Connecting with Others as a Way of Reimagining the Self

When we put these texts into conversation with one another, we can seethe patterns of alternative yet similar feminist issues and aspirations in women's writings across borders. The construction of female identity in these texts has an important effect on the way the woman writer views and experiences the world and writes about it. Moreover, intersectional challenges such as race, ethnicity, economic status that women face in expressing themselves need more attention. Mere national or local analyses of these experiences expressed through the writing of women witnessing their contemporary societies often results in becoming fixated on the bigger picture and ignoring the fact that as women in patriarchal societies, women writers share various struggles and experiences beyond mere geographical or linguistic borders.

Moreover, where and in which language these texts are written should not interfere with their multiple and at times possibly diverse interpretations as instances of shared experiences of women. Our conscious and at times unconscious perceptions of binary oppositions—for instance Western and non-Western representations of women—often lead to exclusionary definitions of feminism and womanhood; therefore, more transnational studies of women's writings are needed to highlight spaces of connection among textual representations in order to emphasize "the distinction between speaking for oneself—speaking as the person one is—and speaking for (in the place of, on behalf of) others" (Alcoff 148). Such attempts are crucial in contemporary feminist scholarships to "avoid cultural essentialism" (Harding 97) and provide a more inclusive space for shared yet various experiences of womanhood.

Despite coming from distinctly different geographical points, languages, and cultural contexts, the two case studies in this chapter show the interconnected nature of women's subjectivation by patriarchy and their attempts to rise above it. Patriarchy is a prevalent theme in these texts since social institutions, while functioning in various ways in different societies, as observed in previous chapters, “do not merely reflect some unitary patriarchal logic but are the site of power relations and political processes through which gender hierarchies are both created and contested” (Glover and Kaplan 17). Thus, through their writings, these women writers reimagine the social spaces where women could have their voices heard and their experiences recognized beyond borders. In other words, women writers use their textual spaces efficiently to reflect female characters' social situations, since they know firsthand that “the silencing of female attempts to articulate an “other-side” to the dominant stories of a given culture is never complete, in that this “side” is not in any absolute sense unimaginable or inconceivable (Hite 3). Looking at this other side, therefore, manifests the possibility of realizing women writers’ reimagination of their communities, regardless of where they come from.

As seen in the analysis of *Things We Left Unsaid*, although Clarice is surrounded by different forms of narratives in her community that seem to direct her toward her traditional role as a woman, it is through her imagination that she can make a space to express herself. While at the end of the story, she seems to be back where she was at the beginning, her new experience and her ability to rise above the dominant narratives has set Clarice as well as the readers free of those mental barriers. At the end of the novel, she has found the power in herself to dream, to fantasize, and to make up her own alternative reality in learning to trust her ability to re-create and own her story.

"Out of Season" similarly directs the narrator's attention, alongside those of the readers, to see the possibility of making connections between experiences of women who come from different cultural settings. Vik's story suggests a transnational outlook on women's shared experiences and social struggles and a reimagination of their social spaces in order for them to change the rules of the game as female subjects of patriarchy, to make sense of a world that does not recognize their underprivileged social situations as women. The story's underlying message gains more significance since in patriarchal societies, in Moi's words, "knowledge—all knowledge—is gendered, that 'women's ways of knowing' are different from men's or, in the full-blown version, that 'women's experiences constitute a different view of reality, an entirely different 'ontology', or way of going about making sense of the world" (148). In other words, it is possible for women coming from different social situations to understand and share these "gendered" knowledge, experiences, and alternative pathways they have discovered in their various journeys.

Furthermore, it is through reading these texts that women can experience the differences in each other's struggles and gain a new understanding of and an ability to question their own narratives and presuppositions of what it means to be a woman in communities heavily laden with patriarchal values and gendered social narratives. Thus, a thorough study of women's representations in mid-late twentieth century women's writings can shed some new light on those exclusionary categories made to distinguish Western and non-Western feminist definitions: in other words, "to say that location bears on meaning and truth is not the same as saying that location determines meaning and truth […] location and positionality should not be conceived as one-dimensional or static, but as multiple and with

varying degrees of mobility" (Alcoff 16). As seen in these case studies, location is important in the forms in which the struggles and achievements manifest themselves, but it is simplistic to think that the same rule applies to women in a particular place. The diversity in the way women around the world see and express themselves through their stories confirms this notion that differences are individual rather than national or local and so can form tendencies across time and location.

One shared pattern seen in the case studies in my work is the significant role other female characters play in affecting the central female character's identity formation. This influence is of particular importance when women's experience and expression are emphasized. The analyses of these case studies have demonstrated that the power women exert on other women—as a result of internalization of patriarchal values—could limit their way of defining themselves and make them conform to the homogenizing gendered narratives. However, they can also help other women express themselves and reimagine their way of being by stepping out of the existing gendered narratives and set examples for women to rewrite their individual stories.

In *The Bell*, Dora is not only confronted by her estranged husband, but also by the presence of other female characters that support and enforce the community's patriarchal values vis à vis their narratives. Therefore, Dora's playing the role of the witch is emblematic of her marginalized position in this community where she is the one who needs to challenge the social structures and fashion a new way of expressing one's self independent of community standards. She, therefore, becomes the trailblazer in reimagining her identity the way she desires, and others follow her example.

Similarly, Zari's position in *Savushun i*s that of a woman who is not only held back by men in her community but mainly by other women. Her life as a woman is affected not only by the female principal's aggressive treatment of Zari when they were children, but also by the ways in which she is surrounded by patriarchal narratives of femininity from other women. As both a young girl and a middle-aged woman, she becomes the symbol of resistance for other girls in her school and in her politically turbulent community. Her “willfullness” (Ahmed 2014) is what drives her to challenge the patriarchal narratives and rewrite her social position in her community.

In comparison to the other two case studies in Chapter 2, the relationship between the central character and other female characters in her community is specifically emphasized in “Princess Ida”. It is against the negative space of other women's conformity to the dominant narratives of femininity in her community that her "eccentric" character is depicted. Like women in the other case studies, she does not receive any support from other women in her community and instead is socially marginalized by them, but her direct influence on her adolescent daughter is how she rewrites her story and that of the generation of women to come. Despite her daughter's resistance to her mother's different way of life, she grows up to realize how Della is taking after her which is emblematic of the way she can continue to challenge the patriarchal narratives of her community.

In "A City like Paradise,” Daneshvar depicts the way the central character and the storyteller have been affected by the different social forces of her community. The maid whose existence is defined through her service to others and who seems to have no individuality or a sense of self, is able to construct one for herself her and others through her stories. It is

through these stories that she creates a social space for herself, expresses her wishes and dreams and opens up space for change through the young generation she raises. While her relationships with other women do not improve—and at time, actually worsen—her already disadvantageous socio-economic status, she succeeds in affecting the consciousness of the children who grow up with her.

The female characters' relationship in "Friend of My Youth" is depicted through different narrative layers. While the central plot of the story is structured around the life of Flora, the two narrators take centre stage in the story in the ways they relate to Flora's story. The story foregrounds the processes in which a story is told and retold in its ability to not merely tell us what happened but also to tell us who the storytellers are. While in telling the story, the narrator's thoughts and expressions are highlighted, her mother's point of view, as the original storyteller of Flora's life, is contrasted. Moreover, Flora becomes the one who is able to reimagine her identity as opposed to the way the mother and daughter storytellers narrate the story. Through these narrative layers, therefore, the influence of other women's subconscious beliefs in the dominant narratives is also revealed.

Despite cultural nuances in each case study, what remains constant in all these instances are the ways the female character in each text is surrounded by hegemonizing gendered institutions and normative behavioral language games. Through the gendered social structure of her community, each female protagonist feels restricted in her ability to *be* herself; in other words, each feels unable to express her identity and freely navigate the world. However, through the very language games she, as any other member of

her community, has learnt to play, she is able to fabricate her own narratives in order to create a space for herself and reimagine her identity.

The distinguishing characteristic of these female characters is their “willfulness” (Ahmed) in embracing their differences and their ability in seeing themselves the way they desire. It is through their power to reimagine alternative ways of defining themselves and fashioning their ways of life that they are able to challenge the dominant social narratives of their communities. Their storytelling, then, becomes a way not only to reimagine their identities as women, but to influence those around them in their community and create spaces for their expression and reshape the rules of the game.

Conclusion: Just the Starting Point on the Journey to Unearth Herstories

This doctoral dissertation is an attempt to contribute to the ever-growing body of transnational feminist literary scholarship. Transnational feminism provides the platform for different forms of women's writings beyond borders to engender cross-cultural conversations. Scholars of transnational feminism(s) advocate for the validity and necessity of women's expressions around the world, which has made it possible for literary scholarship to exceed a focus on national literary studies and homogenizing feminist practices. Through this lens, my research has found similar patriarchal patterns in the depiction of communities and liberatory strategies of female characters within them.

In order to highlight such patterns and tendencies in women's writings, I have examined the case studies in this research as being instances of "narratives of community" (Zagarell). This genre foregrounds the intricate relationship between female character and her textual community. Through these instances of narrative of community, formal and informal representations of institutions and dominant social narratives have been identified and juxtaposed in order to highlight the shared dominant patterns in their various social structures.

While women scribe their stories within specific social situations, it is the role of literary comparatists to highlight their similar strategies and emphasize the role of "feminist scholarship in the identification of [narratives of community]" (Zagarell 507). Thus, in order to communicate women's struggles and for different instances of women's expression to inform feminist scholarships, more transnational work needs to be done to investigate women's specific positions and their shared experiences comparatively.

Through a lifelike depiction of these communities, the women writers in this study are able to represent the social position of women who are their contemporaries. For instance, in their observations and depictions of their contemporary society, Munro's "Princess Ida" and Daneshvar's "A City like Paradise" get very close to semi-autobiographical pieces where the writers are weaving their stories around a female character representing their own experiences when they were growing up in their male-oriented communities as attempts to push the social boundaries.

Moreover, my research has found similar tendencies in central female characters' challenging and/or changing the dominant language games of their communities. These characters' willful (Ahmed) attempts to deviate from the hegemonic norms of their "gendered institutions," (Montoya) lead to the categorization of a large number of female protagonists as outsiders in their communities. While the main challenge they often face is the criticizing presence and attitudes of other women in the community, all the female characters in this study are able to make up their own alternative social spaces through their acts of storytelling.

Having learnt the rules of the social games they are part of, these writers create social spaces where their characters can challenge and/or change the dominant language games. Hence, when their nonconformism, differences and individuality are not tolerated by others, they present their own little narratives of change through their acts of storytelling. Storytelling, therefore, becomes the shared strategy for these female characters to reimagine their identities, validate their experiences, and rewrite their individual expressions of womanhood. In other words, they use these contested social spaces to rewrite their own alternative social positions.

Suggestions for Further Studies

This study has offered reading strategies to identify the patterns of oppression, struggle and liberation of female characters in their homogenizing communities. It has also illustrated the use of these strategies by presenting some instances of narratives of community to emphasize the unique position of the female characters to challenge and change their predefined social positions. Based on this premise, this reading strategy could be a point of departure for many different comparative studies in women's writings.

While this study has focused on the representations of female characters in textual communities, another significant issue to be investigated in future studies of this kind is to compare and contrast the patterns of representation of individual resistance based on different genders that characters identify with in narratives of community. For instance, foregrounding non-heteronormative representations of women in their communities would be another way of bringing different forms of gender representations together in order to highlight similarities and differences in other instances of women's writings from around the world. Highlighting different representations of gender in comparative and transnational studies can help identify patterns of oppression and contestation in literature beyond borders and further inform literary and political feminist studies.

Another issue to be examined would be to see if writers of narratives of community coming from different historical times and different forms of representation would respond in a similar way to the reading strategy developed by this study. While this study has examined texts that were written in mid to late twentieth century, it would be worth exploring similar patterns in older or more contemporary instances of women's writings. Moreover, future

comparative studies could investigate patterns of struggle in patriarchal communities as represented in autobiographical writings by women.

For example, many scholars (see Robert Thacker) believe that many of Munro's works can be read as semi-autobiographies based on her own experiences in Canadian's society's move to recognizing various representations of womanhood. In addition, Daneshvar's "letters" presents a fascinating resource for feminist and sociological studies in the personal and professional development of the woman writer in her society's move to modernity. These letters were composed during her academic stays in the United States depicting her life as a writer and an academic in Iran—which have been compiled in four volumes, *Namehaye Simin Daneshvar va Jalale Ale Ahmad [Letters of Simin Daneshar and Jalal Ale Ahmad]*.

I believe that the study of the function of storytelling in women's autobiographical writings will offer a much-needed insight into transnational feminist and comparative literary scholarship. As another form of narrative of community, these writings that feature the life and work of the woman writer can offer valuable insights into the experiences and expressions of the woman writer as the ultimate storyteller of her community. Juxtaposing these autobiographies with the fictional writings of the same authors, furthermore, can provide a space to highlight the forms and processes of storytelling in the move towards representing and reimagining communities that value women's experiences and right of expression around the world.

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