

August 2018

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Recommended Citation

Mohammad, Sumaya M. Alhaj (2018). Speaking and Silence as Means of Resistance in Alifa Rifaat's *Distant View of a Minaret and Bahiyya's Eyes*. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19(6), 264-275. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol19/iss6/17>

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Speaking and Silence as Means of Resistance in Alifa Rifaat's *Distant View of a Minaret* and *Bahiyya's Eyes*

By Sumaya M. Alhaj Mohammad¹

Abstract

This study aims at investigating the dilemma of creating a counter discourse that speaks against the dominant androcentric one in Alifa Rifaat's fiction. The study explores the characterization of the protagonists of two short stories: "Distant View of a Minaret" and "Bahiyya's Eyes," culled from Rifaat's collection *Distant View of a Minaret and Other Short Stories* (1983). These stories present two different paradigms of resistance that the female protagonists use, which are speaking and silence. The study argues that both speaking and silence are attempts to heal women's cyclic trauma, as they are means of representing women's experience and oppression over time. The protagonists' response to the hegemonic discourse in the two stories is *carnavalesque* because the use of language (or its absence) aims at deconstructing the phallogocentric discourse and establishing a new one. Accordingly, Rifaat uses two narrative points of view in each story to express the protagonists' new discourses. Speaking and silence, thus, are not to be judged according to the symbolic discourse of men; instead they are placed in the purview of the Discourse of the Hysteric, which is regarded as an arena of resistance for women.

Keywords: Alifa Rifaat, feminism, discourse, "Distant View of a Minaret", "Bahiyya's Eyes", Egyptian Fiction.

Introduction

"The subject is what speaks, or, more precisely, what signifies, and subjects learn in culture to reproduce or to challenge the meanings and values inscribed in the signifying practices of the society that shapes them."

-Neil Badmington, Readers in Cultural Criticism: Posthumanism, p. ix.

In patriarchal societies, nothing seems as disturbing as a woman holding her pen and writing her experience. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf brings the dilemma of women's writing into question by imagining that Shakespeare has a sister named Judith, who dreams to be a writer. Woolf's treatise reveals that unlike the male writer whose way of success is paved, the female writer has "many ghosts to fight, [and] many prejudices to overcome" (Woolf, 77). Female

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writers need to deconstruct the pervasive metaphor of the pen(is)², and to believe in their ability of having authority over their texts. To do so, they need to have control over their own bodies and experiences. Hélène Cixous argues in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) that a "[w]oman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (Cixous, 875). This body-text dichotomy, that l'écriture féminine³ emphasizes, portrays the importance of the individual as well as the collective experiences of women, who write with "white ink," as Cixous expresses it (Cixous, 881), since they use several means, other than the orthodox linguistic system, to express themselves.

It is unsurprising, then, that writing has become women's voices that threaten the phallogocentric rigid discourse by attempting to establish new protean ones. The issue of women's writing within a male-dominated discourse has gained prominence in the works of several feminist theorists who take Jacques Lacan's theory of discourse as a framework of their investigation of this predicament. Based on Lacan's four types of discourse; *Discourse of the master*, *Discourse of the University*, *Discourse of the Analyst*, and *Discourse of the Hysteric*, patriarchal men reject women's writings because they do not want to lose grip over language which grants them superiority and makes of them the *master signifiers* of the *symbolic discourse*.⁴ To keep this privilege, and to maintain the idea that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar question that "a pen is a metaphorical penis" (Gilbert and Gubar, 82), the man considers any discourse that does not correspond to his rules as hysteric. This explains why madness and hysteria are usually ascribed to women's psyche. It also elucidates why the Discourse of the Hysteric can be perceived as a sign of resistance that marks the symptoms of rebellion to unsettle and deconstruct the man-created Master Discourse.

This problematic use of men's language to convey women's experiences makes women's narratives intricate, as it leads them to practice what Elaine Showalter calls a "double-voiced discourse" (Showalter, 201). That is to say that though women are compelled to use the male discourse, they are aware of the implied agendas and the discursive linguistic constructions that this language suggests. Several women, thus, attempt to convey their experiences not only through the system of signification, but also through its absence. Hence, silence, which has been long regarded as powerlessness, has gained a meaning of strength and resistance as some feminists perceive. Kennan Ferguson argues that "[t]his approach has caused a central ambivalence in recent feminist theory: how to both explicate the abusive power relationships that have historically kept women's voices from being heard while also celebrating the work that women have done within the spheres allowed to them" (Ferguson, 4).

Silence is criticized as a sign of absence by several feminists who contend that women are marginalized and deprived of their voices, and therefore, they should speak from their margins and write back to phallogocentrism. Spivak's provocative question of whether the subaltern can

²Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's question if "a pen is a metaphorical penis" (82).

³A *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines the French concept of l'écriture féminine as: "(F 'feminine writing') A concept proposed by the French feminist Hélène Cixous. It denotes writing which is typically, characteristically feminine in style, language, tone and feeling, and completely different from (and opposed to) male language and discourse – though she does say in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) that this is not to do with biological determinism; women often write in male discourse and men can write in a feminine way." (p. 225)

⁴Lacan's theory of the four discourses is presented in Seminar XVII. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII: Psychoanalysis Upside Down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*. Cormac Gallagher (trans.), 1969-1970. https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-XVII_1_envers_de_la_P.pdf

speak⁵ has aroused hydra-headed responses that urge women to write back in order to represent themselves. Bell hooks, however, believes that marginalization is not restricted to women; it is rather emphasized by the hierarchal structure of the Western society. Hooks argues that: "While male supremacy encourages the use of abusive force to maintain male domination of women, it is the Western philosophical notion of hierarchal rule and coercive authority that is the root of violence against women, of adult violence against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominant" (hooks, 1984, 118). Hooks believes that those who are marginalized should question their condition; otherwise, they will be rendered victimized (ibid, 1). There is a need for a radical backlash for those people to speak from their margins in order to subvert the whole hierarchal system that supports oppression and violence and institutionalizes them.

Other feminists like Susan Gal, on the other hand, argue that there are different definitions of power, and that silence can be a strategy of resistance to the masculine discourse. After observing some linguistic practices, Gal concludes that "women's linguistic practices made visible a crack, a fault line in the dominant male discourse of gender and power, revealing it to be not monolithic but contradictory and thus vulnerable" (Gal, 169). She observes that silence has a paradoxical power, since the silent person is a good listener who can meticulously detect meanings. She, accordingly, considers silence as a kind of interaction that contributes to enacting a discourse.

Both speaking and silence, therefore, attempt at exposing women's oppression through destabilizing the symbolic order. Such women strive to deconstruct the authoritative language of men through using counter-ideologies and narrative techniques that can create a solid, yet protean system, which guarantees the relatability of the female characters to readers. Women writers make this endeavor of the transformation of power obvious through the *bildung*⁶ of the female characters who struggle within the phallogocentric discourse that limits their scope of expression. Consequently, not only through speech one does grasp the character's psyche, but also through silence which represents a strikingly different discourse of resistance, especially as it imitates the collective silence of women through a long historical period of time.

This study aims at exploring the contingency of expression through language or its absence by analyzing the female protagonists of two stories by the Egyptian writer Alifa Rifaat (1930-1996). The two stories I have culled from Rifaat's collection *Distant View of a Minaret and Other Short Stories* (1983)⁷ portray two different paradigms of resisting the phallogocentric discourse. In the first story "Distant View of a Minaret," the unnamed protagonist reacts to male oppression with silence, while in "Bahiyya's Eyes" the protagonist tells her story to her daughter as a sign of women's solidarity that can put a limit on women's suffering. The study proves that both speaking and silence can be means of resistance against the authoritative discourse of men.

⁵Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.). New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Pp. 66-111.

⁶Bildung is defined in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* as "both the action of giving a form and the form itself . . ." (112). W. H. Bruford also argues that "[t]he inwardness, the culture ['Bildung'] of a German implies introspectiveness; an individualistic cultural conscience; consideration for the careful tending, the shaping, deepening and perfecting of one's own personality . . ." (vii).

⁷Rifaat, Alifa. *Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories*. Denys Johnson-Davies, (trans.). London: Heinemann Educational Books LTD, 1983.

“Distant View of a Minaret”

“A void may be empty but not be in a vacuum.”

-Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” p. 136.

“Distant View of a Minaret” starts with an unnamed wife staring at her sleeping husband after having sex. She is dissatisfied as he always sleeps right after having an orgasm, without paying attention to her demands to prolong the intercourse so she could also enjoy. The wife then washes her body (following the Islamic practice which perceives sex as contaminating), hears the call for the prayer, and looks out of the window to observe the view which is being gradually changing because of the newly constructed buildings that are obscuring the minaret of the mosque. The wife then makes coffee and goes back to the bedroom to find her husband dead. She asks her son to call a doctor, and indifferently pours a cup of coffee.

The significantly unnamed protagonist struggles from the very beginning of the story with the fact that she is excluded from the symbolic discourse by being called “mad” (Rifaat, 2). Her husband, who restricts her mind through restricting her body, connects her sexuality to madness, as he believes in the patriarchal idea that libido is ascribed to men. During the sexual intercourse, when the protagonist has “dug her fingernails into [her husband’s] back, compelling him to remain inside her,” the husband wonders: “Are you mad, woman? Do you want to kill me?” (Ibid, 2) After this incident, the protagonist acts apathetically; she remains silent and calm, that when he died, “[s]he returned to the living room and poured out the coffee for herself. She was surprised at how calm she was” (ibid, 4). This response of indifference, however, does not mean that she accepts her situation as perceived by the patriarchal reasoning; it rather places her in a different realm; “The Discourse of the Hysteric.” Through this discourse, which is unintelligible by patriarchy, she attempts to find herself a separate identity, and to be detached from the androcentric discourse that oppresses her.

In the beginning of the story, the protagonist blames herself for being “unreasonable in [her] demands” (Rifaat, 2), but soon, readers, who have access to her mind, sense that she abandons her feeling of guilt, as she becomes aware of herself as an independent individual, rather than a man’s property. There are some symbols that lead readers to realize that the protagonist is going through a process of self-assertion using a counter-discourse. The spider web that she observes on the wall, for instance, parallels with her way of thinking, for she starts to see new threads and to realize the misery of her life. Also, the sound of music coming from her son’s room is analogous to her prayer in her room. This image poignantly emphasizes inequity in the patriarchal society, which grants men freedom (symbolized by music) while it leaves women paralyzed in the zone of religion. That is to say that this image implies that religion constructs a discursive ideology whose ultimate purpose is to limit women to the traditional role of domesticity.

The fact that Rifaat’s collection was published in 1983 in Egypt is highly significant since this is the time when the Muslim brotherhood became more dominant in the country during the presidency of Hosni Mubarak. Therefore, the religious images are essential in analyzing the protagonist’s psyche. The anonymous protagonist, who does not find the androcentric system of language sufficient or even appropriate, symbolizes the surrounding objects to create her own *carnavalesque*⁸ arena, which becomes her liminal space to resist her Othering. The image of the

⁸“Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) coined the word ‘carnivalization’ (he introduces it in the chapter ‘From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse’, in his book *The Dialogic Imagination* – translated in 1981) to describe the

minaret of the nearby mosque, for example, is deciphered as a phallic one, for *the religious is political*.⁹ In other words, religion is used to serve the patriarchal mentality that oppresses women. The narrator says:

This single minaret, one of the twin minarets of the Mosque of Sultan Hasan, with above it a single slice of the Citadel, was all that was now left of the panoramic view she had once had of old Cairo, with its countless mosques and minarets against a background of the Mokattam Hills and Mohamed Ali's Citadel. . . . In time this single minaret would also be obscured by some new buildings.
(Rifaat, 3)

This description of the view corresponds to the religious scene, which is also a patriarchal one. The narrative suggests, through the image of the gradual invisibility of the minaret which the protagonist observes, that the oppression of women should disappear and be soon replaced by a new scene.

Several women Arab readers will identify with this manipulation of the religious discourse to subdue women. The Egyptian modernist writer and reformer Qasim Amin (1865-1908) argues against the Othering of women; a common and most of the time unquestionable Islamic belief, by saying that:

Muslims believe that women are the mistresses of their quarters in the home, but that their role ends at the doorstep of the house. These are the beliefs of those who live in a fantasy world, whose shortsightedness has blinded them from seeing beyond those fantasies, setting a veil between them and reality.

Were Muslims to reflect on this situation, they would realize that exempting woman from her first responsibility, mainly her preparation for self-sufficiency, has caused her to lose her rights. Giving a man the responsibility for every aspect of a woman's life has also meant that he has gained control over her rights. Thus, a man expects no more of a woman than of a pleasant pet whose needs are provided for by the master in return for his entertainment. (Amin, 15)

Amin's description of the condition of women in Islamic societies is what Rifaat's protagonist is going through in the course of her marital life. She, therefore, presents religious images to express her rejection of her situation as a domesticated Other, who is restricted by the religious laws that men lay down. Simone de Beauvoir also stresses this danger of Othering by stating that "what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other" (de Beauvoir, 27). The protagonist resists this status with a reaction of indifference to the man who is supposedly her master (based on the androcentric discourse). The fact that the events of the story occur in the house (the woman's sphere), and that the finale is a complete silence prove that a woman can revolt from the domestic space to which she is restricted, and through silence, which becomes her own language.

penetration or incorporation of carnival into everyday life, and its shaping effect on language and literature. . . . Bakhtin puts forward the theory that the element of carnival in literature is subversive; it disrupts authority and introduces alternatives. It is a kind of liberating influence and he sees it as part of the subversion of the sacred word in Renaissance culture. (Cuddon, 104)

⁹ Echoing the rallying cry of the second-wave feminism: "The personal is political."

Thus, Rifaat's protagonist contributes to changing the stereotypical assumption of the passivity of silence, or as Susan Gal puts it that: "silence, like any linguistic form, gains different meanings and has different material effects within specific institutional and cultural contexts. Silence and inarticulateness are not, in themselves, necessarily signs of powerlessness" (Gal, 176). The protagonist's silence disturbs the social norms that expect a woman to weep after her husband's death. Her silence, however, is pregnant with a multiplicity of possibilities about her *bildung* as a character who goes through a transformation to become a non-conformist and unexpected individual.

Although Islam mistakenly connects the silence of women to acceptance,¹⁰ the protagonist aims at presenting a new meaning of silence other than the Islamic passive one. This makes Rifaat's narrative remarkably revolutionary, as the protagonist does not express her rage and rejection of patriarchy traditionally. There is also an embedded warning of the religious agendas that assign women's practices to weakness and absence. Rifaat proves, contrariwise, that the very concept of power can be redefined by women, and that the absence of women's voices can be a presence, as silence is a void that does not exist in a vacuum.

"Bahiyya's Eyes"¹¹

*I am speaking from a place in the margins where I am different, where I see things differently . . .
Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet here.
-Bell hooks Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics, p.152.*

Unlike the third-person narrative of an unknown protagonist in "Distant View of a Minaret," the protagonist of "Bahiyya's Eyes" tells her own story as a first-person narrator. The story is initiated by an elderly woman, Bahiyya, telling her story to her daughter. Bahiyya indicates that she has visited the doctor who has told her that she is losing her sight gradually and will soon be blind. She, then, flashbacks to the events of her life since her childhood and refers her blindness to the tears that she has shed all over her life. Her story reveals a great deal of suffering mainly because she lives in a patriarchal society where she is abused by her brother, circumcised by the women of her neighborhood, and forced into an arranged marriage. Bahiyya laments being a woman in a society where she has to be subservient to men. She explains that even after the death of her husband, she has to depend on other male relatives because as a woman she is perceived as an inferior.

The narratology is crystallized through Bahiyya's monologue to her daughter. She says: "Daughter, I'm not crying now because I'm fed up or regret that the Lord created me as a woman. No, it's not that. It's just that I'm sad about my life and my youth that have come and gone without my knowing how to live them really and truly as a woman" (Rifaat, 11). These lines are the core of women's dilemma in patriarchal societies; they are selfless, unaware of their needs and rights, and expected to perform their expected gender role according to the script ready-made by the male-dominated society.

The idea of breaking silence is no less significant than writing silence because it contributes to consciousness-raising and to forming a surrogate for a pre-established linguistic system. Rifaat

¹⁰ In Islam the silence of a virgin woman as a response to her marriage signifies acceptance. This rule supports the idea of women's shyness when it comes to marriage; an issue related to sexuality.

¹¹Bahiyya is a folkloric revolutionary Egyptian woman who is famous for her beautiful eyes.

creates a story-within-story through granting Bahiyya a voice to tell her experience to her daughter. This experience of telling is not only cathartic, but also therapeutic on the personal as well as the collective level. Hélène Cixous calls women to write back to the patriarchal society; she says bluntly: "Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery...not yourself." She believes that "Woman must write woman," as there are shared sufferings that have to be exposed (Cixous, 313). Women have also to accept the "heterogeneous contributions" of all women, and celebrate their differences, as such differences establish a plurivocality of voices that can defy androcentrism (Stanton, 317), as Cixous expresses it.

Bahiyya, who is traumatized due to her harsh experience, tells her story to her daughter as a symptom of what Freud calls "repetition compulsion."¹² She decides to exempt the new generation of women from the actual repetition of their suffering by repeating it through language instead. Bahiyya is wounded physically and psychology due to several patriarchal practices, such as genital mutilation and forced marriage among others; therefore, she decides to heal her personal trauma and to contribute to diminishing the collective one through telling her story.

Cathy Caruth emphasizes that trauma "is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and language" (Caruth, 4). As Bahiyya speaks, thus, she addresses her previously unresolved issues and looks forward to create a new discourse that resists the mainstream androcentric one that silences women. This anticipated discourse considers the abstract values that are eschewed by patriarchy, such as love and caring. This idea of the need for a radical change in the system of values is stressed by Marxist-feminists who argue that the values related to women are intentionally disregarded. Nancy Chodorow argues that "women's work in the home and the maternal role are devalued because they are outside the sphere of monetary exchange and unmeasurable in monetary terms, and because love, though supposedly valued, is valued only within a devalued and powerless realm" (Chodorow, 89).

Bahiyya's story, therefore, is an extension of love that she attempts to pass to the next generation. It is also a reaction against violence which is entrenched by the society and practiced by both men and women. This is obvious in the scene of circumcision, where women were also part of the violent patriarchal authority. The function of this sentimental discourse in the story, however, is not to make readers victimize Bahiyya; it rather creates familiarity with the situation between the female character and the female reader as part of spreading awareness towards women's rights. It is a call for women to unveil the conspiracy about their roles in society, and to discover their authentic selves by stopping their cyclical suffering, not necessarily by using the well-known androcentric system of values, which connect violence to love, as bell hooks argues. Hooks clarifies this idea by saying that: "love and violence have become so intertwined in this society that many people, especially women, fear that eliminating violence will lead to the loss of love" (123-4).

Bahiyya is, thus, courageous enough to break the distorted values of patriarchy, unlike several female fiction characters who could not transcend their scripts that exist a priori, such as James Joyce's Eveline, who fails to find a new discourse, and thus stays indecisive and passive at the end of the story repeating her mother's experience. In the end of the story, Eveline's "eyes gave [her lover] no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (Joyce, 31) at the time when moving

¹² The term is explained in: Freud, Sigmund (1955), "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *Bartleby Books Online*. [first published 1920]. James Strachey, (trans.), Toronto: Hogarth Press. <http://www.bartleby.com/276/>

forward is necessary. Contrariwise, readers can detect Bahiyya's moment of recognition which produces a revolutionary discourse that aims at changing women's reality.

Apparently, Bahiyya speaks from her margin; the only site offered to her in the society. Juliet Mitchell believes that women can still express their femininity within the androcentric discourse. She comments that: "it was suggested . . . that this area of the carnival can also be the area of the feminine. . . . It is not that the carnival cannot be disruptive of the law, but it disrupts only within the terms of that law" (Mitchell, 149). It is essential, thus, for women to speak from their margins in order to decenter the authoritative discourse of men. Feminists call for substituting the whole corrupted patriarchal system since they believe that egalitarianism will never be realized by unjust rules.

In her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, bell hooks likewise argues that the whole system that is imbued with sexism should be eradicated. Hooks says that:

Individuals who fight for the eradication of sexism without supporting struggles to end racism or classism undermine their own efforts. Individuals who fight for the eradication of racism or classism while supporting sexist oppression are helping to maintain the cultural basis of all forms of group oppression. (Hooks, 1984, 39)

Hooks, however, believes that the margin is not restricted to women as some feminists believe; she contends that there are "privileged women who live at the center" and from where "[m]uch feminist theory emerges" and therefore their "perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin" (hooks, 1984, ii). This makes the role of the marginalized women intricate, as establishing a new egalitarian discourse means re-establishing history and culture. The carnival, hence, becomes the platform of starting a change in the structure of the society; an ultimate purpose that feminists aspire. This use of the Bakhtinian carnival in feminist theory supports the belief that the structure of the society is in a state of flux; thus, the levels of domination can be altered. To do so, the powerless women should reject their victimization, which stems from their acceptance of "their lot in life without organized protest, without collective anger or rage," as hooks puts it (ibid, 1).

Bahiyya rejects this state of acceptance as she gets older and realizes the dilemma. Her gradual vision loss in the course of the story goes along with a gradually gained insight about her reality. Though she is incapable of removing the masks and living as an authentic self, she decides in a moment of epiphany to disturb the patriarchal domination by awakening her daughter. Bahiyya's monologue, therefore, is "carnavalesque," to use Bakhtin's concept; as she resists androcentrism from behind her masks.

The carnivalesque is not only portrayed in Rifaat's fiction, but also in different feminist literary works, particularly in the finale, usually through rejecting the patriarchal laws. In the final scene of Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1879), for instance, Nora leaves the house without taking her keys or her wedding ring. Her act shows that she cannot tolerate her husband's notion of her as an object or an inexperienced child. He, for example, never talks to her about serious matters, as he believes that she is unreasonable enough to understand men's matters. Also, in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and in Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" (1978), the female protagonists, Edna and Susan commit suicide. Their suicide can be read literally and metaphorically to indicate that women seek to deliberately leave the patriarchal system to start a new life. The Carnavalesque and the Discourse of the Hysteric are also omnipresent in Charlotte

Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), in which the protagonist Jane finds a feminine discourse, the wallpaper, within the androcentric one, the room. She also questions the objectivity of the scientific discourse that men claim to have in order to subjugate women. Her narrative is fragmented as she suffers from post-partum depression, which was thought of as hysteria. Her mental thoughts reveal men's failure to treat such depression, and their exploitation of the case to control women and to accuse them of madness. Jane's hallucinations, after all, are the source of her power in the story. Her final decision to tear the wallpaper and to creep over her husband's body is similar to Bahiyya's decision to tell her story, since both decisions aim at decentering the dominant discourse and creating a new one.

Bahiyya decides to save her daughter, who represents the coming generation of women though Bahiyya herself realizes that her own life is wasted. Obviously, Bahiyya believes in sisterhood and consciousness-raising towards women's issues; she strongly believes that gender roles can be subverted because they are no more than *simulacra*.¹³¹⁴ Through this narrative, Rifaat attempts to destroy the phallic symbolic system, and to create a heterogeneous site where the subject is not fixed, but rather in-process. At this point of the narrative, Bahiyya becomes an agent who has the ability to change her situation from an object to a subject. She, eventually, finds her existential self that will help her daughter establish an autonomous identity.

Conclusion

Where there is power, there is resistance . . . there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary.

-Foucault, The History of Sexuality, pp. 95-6.

In conclusion, Rifaat's two stories "Distant View of a Minaret" and "Bahiyya's Eyes" prove that women have established new discourses that subvert the putative definition of power created by patriarchy. Both the presence of women's voices and their absence signify resistance and becoming. Bahiyya's voice emerging from the margin and the silence of the unnamed protagonist of "Distant View of a Minaret" explain how the stories of women are remarkably imbued with power. Writing for women, therefore, transcends the orthodox linguistic system to an experience of *jouissance*¹⁵ since the pleasure of writing tallies with the sought-for sexual pleasure of women. Women write their bodies, their silences as well as their experiences to resist the master discourse of men. Hence, sexuality is a dominant theme in many of feminist narratives, including Rifaat's two mentioned stories, as sexual images debunk the assumption that libido is masculine.

¹³"The terms 'simulacra' and its singular form 'simulacrum' were coined by the French poststructuralist theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) in his discussion of the changing relationship between the real and the original in postmodern culture. . . . In the postmodern age, there is a complete breakdown between representation and reality and we are left with signs and symbols that come to precede and substitute for the real. In other words, there are no originals, only copies without referents or origin. (Cuddon, pp. 657-8).

¹⁴ Cf Judith Butler's theory of the performativity.

¹⁵ Plaisir/jouissance: Terms used with a special signification by Roland Barthes in his book *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973), a discussion of the lisible/scriptible or readerly/writerly (q.v.) text. The writerly text, he opines, offers two kinds of enjoyment: plaisir, 'pleasure'; and jouissance, 'bliss'. Jouissance carries connotations of ecstasy and sexual delight, and Barthes offers an aesthetics based on the pleasure of the body. . . . the jouissance, a heightened form of pleasure, derives from a sense of interruption, a 'breakdown' or gap, where, perhaps, something unorthodox or unexpected occurs.

This text-body analogy is significant since women's sexuality, similar to their language, is intentionally ignored by patriarchy. "Bahiyya's Eyes" and "Distant View of a Minaret," therefore, shed light on sexual oppressions, among other oppressions that women suffer from in patriarchal societies. They, for instance, expose taboos, such as circumcision and marital rape.

To realize this discourse of resistance, Alifa Rifaat presents two contrastive paradigms in her stories "Distant View of a Minaret" and "Bahiyya's Eyes." The protagonists that she culls respond differently to the oppression of male-dominated societies to prove that both speaking and silence can be efficient in unsettling the laws of patriarchy. She courageously breaks away from the dominant discourse, by presenting these two non-conformist protagonists. Such female characters essentially question the very sources of the channels of power in the society and create new identities that transcend the rigid patriarchal discourse.

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