



Gender and Two Major Traumas of 20th and 21st Century: War and Breast Cancer

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Review Article

"Children here find refuge in their hopes to die. The fact that death is equated to life is horrifying me. How are we going to deal with this generation in the future, how could we talk about life?" (Message from Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, working in the Palestinian Balata camp during the Israeli raids of March 2002).

"I carressed my left breast, I rolled the lump under my fingers and I told myself it was at the exact same place where my mother, thirty-seven years earlier, had sewed up the yellow star. Finally, it had hit us. The much hoped for punishment was here. Would the dead be resurrected?" (Ania Francos, p. 47).

The first quote is from an email message I received from Nadera, an extraordinary woman I met in Istanbul in September 2001, who works with and for women in Israel and Palestine. It very much sums up the place we have reached in our present world: children in the Middle East and in many parts of the world, hope to die, the world offers them only despair, injustices are the order of the day... How can it go on like this? How can we go on living in such a world?

The second one is by Ania Francos, a Jewish woman suffering from breast cancer who ultimately died from it. Throughout her book, *Sauve-toi Lola*, she compares her trial with breast cancer to the ordeal her family went through with the Holocaust.

In both quotes, we find History repeating itself, as if human beings had so little imaginations and resourceful creativity, that the only response they have to violence is more violence and war which in turn brings more violence and bloodshed.

In this article I would like to make the connection between two major traumas of 20th and 21st century: war and breast cancer. Throughout my book, *Cancer Journeys*, I draw consistently on the same parallel, equating cancer and war. Having suffered in my body through the war in Lebanon and through breast cancer, having witnessed the agony and death of loved ones during the bombing of the city, and at the bedside of friends succumbing to cancer, I began to get the feeling that the two were connected.

Close analysis has indeed produced a number of similarities.

I was in terrific pain when I woke up after my mastectomy, and was given what are commonly known as "pain killers." There is an uncannily frequent use in medicine of words that connote violence.

In the treatment of cancer, military metaphors and violent images abound. The body is 'attacked' by poisons in chemotherapy, or "nuked" as some say; patients undergo "radiation"; surgical intervention is called an "operation."

But there's more: chemotherapy as we know it was discovered during World War II, "thanks" if I dare say, to the observed effects of nerve gas. After an explosion of mustard gas bomb containing nitrogen in a submarine, it was observed that those on board who had been exposed were all deficient in white blood cells. Since leukaemia features a surplus of white blood cells, it was thought that nitrogen could halt the proliferation of the undesired cells. And thus chemotherapy was born.

The presence of war symbolism in cancer made me hate the disease all the more. My entire being, mind, body and spirit, are in revolt against this violence-laden aspect of cancer, and all other aspects as well, but this one in particular. I detest violence, and I sincerely yearn for the day when there will be gentler, more peaceful treatments for this disease.

War and the aggressive fight against cancer serve only to transfer the problem, placing emphasis on the symptoms without getting to the origin of the evil. War and "battling" cancer are not intrinsically necessary, but rather represent a failure to deal with problems in alternative ways, to resolve disorder in a situation that is out of control. Wars of mass destruction and the aggressive fight against cancer are the touchstones of the 20th century, of a world that contradiction and conflict have reduced to tatters.

Lebanon has had its share of war and destruction in the last decades, between 1975 and 1992, it was torn apart by a civil war fed by many countries worldwide that cashed in with sales of weapons to various militias, sometimes to both sides, regardless of

alliance. Some militias in exchange for money and weapons buried nuclear waste products in various parts of Lebanon. The Lebanese population is now paying the price with a rise in cancers of all kinds. Cancers of the mind and heavy depressions plague the youth that have had to deal with the war. The wounds and scars are visible. It will take a long time for the country and its people to heal. And then again two summers ago, Israel hit again in response to Hezbollah capturing of two of their soldiers and managed to destroy the whole infrastructure of the country, polluting the air, sea and land, leaving behind million of fragmentation bombs. It will take years again for Lebanon to come out of this new disaster!

The hairdresser who came to do Mother's hair, when I was visiting her in Beirut in 1995 while recovering from breast cancer, told me he was used to seeing hair that turned out like mine due to cancer treatments. It was radiation, particularly, that made it curly in that strange, electric way. In Arabic he said to me that *kahraba* (electricity) caused *kahraba*. I didn't believe it when people had told me hair reacted differently to these treatments, hair that used to be curly became straight and straight hair turned curly. I thought they were old wives tales. And I could tell people thought I was making it up when I told them my hair was not curly like that before.

The Beirut hairdresser told me there were two kinds of cancer: the feminine and the masculine, the feminine was much more virulent than the masculine. It was very aggressive, a real killer. I pondered over his remark: gender differences applied to illness. I had always been interested in gender differences. It was the subject of one of my books. In it I analyzed how gender differences were closely linked to war. Sexuality and war were interconnected. This popular image of cancer reinforced my analysis in showing that the fear men have of women was manifested even in their portrayal of disease. The female brand of a disease (is there any such thing scientifically?) was much more dangerous than the male one? It killed faster. Where did the idea come from?

Cancer victims enter, or are pushed into, a space which I have called "a zone of illness," where they lose control over their lives and their freedom of choice; and this state, too, resembles that of concentration camp victims. Patients enter an organization conceived as a rational machine, an industrial machine made to treat the disease, one whose discourse is not to give a conscious choice to the patient but to orient her/him in a programmed direction. The patient is not warned about many of the consequences of the treatment she/he will be subjected to, but discovers them on the way: castrations, mutilations, loss of certain limbs' use, certain pains, threat of other treatment-induced cancers, weakness, debilitation, fragility, death, danger. They are accompanied by other consequences often warned about but minimized as "secondary effects" while actually so central: baldness, nausea, pain, muscle weakening, heart muscle damage, loss of appetite, burns, tiredness.

The importance of incorporating a discourse on sexuality when formulating a revolutionary feminist theory became very evident

as I started analyzing and writing about the Lebanese war. The war itself seemed closely connected with the way people perceived and acted out their sense of love and power, as well as their sense of relationship to their partners, to the family and to the general society. Usually the argument has been made that women's issues detract from the war effort, that wars create such conditions of despair that, within this context, women's issues are unimportant, and if the "right" side in a war were to win, women's problems would automatically be solved. I argued the reverse. I suggested that sexuality was centrally involved in motivations to war, and if women's issues were dealt with from the beginning, wars might be avoided, and revolutionary struggles and movements for liberation would take on a very different path. Justice cannot be won in the midst of injustice. All these levels are interwoven.

In my book on Sexuality and War, I analyzed how the whole range of oppression women suffered from in the Middle East: forced marriage, virginity, and the codes of honour, forced confinement, the veil, polygamy, repudiation, beating, lack of freedom and the denial of the possibility to achieve their aims and desires in life--practices, some of which motivated me to run away from Lebanon at the age of twenty-two--were closely connected to the internal war in Lebanon (I was not referring to the Israeli and Syrian occupations, nor to the foreign interferences). There are at least seventeen political parties--with many subdivisions--that were fighting each other in Lebanon. During the war, each of these parties had different interests; each tried to dominate a small piece of territory and impose its vision of Lebanon onto that territory. Each group tried to dominate the others largely through the control of women in a way I tried to formulate. One of the codes of Arab tribes is *sharaf* (honour) which also means the preservation of girls' virginity, to ensure that the women are kept exclusively for the men of their tribe.

The means of conquest were given a value in proportion to their success. The gun, the machine-gun, the cannon--all masculine sexual symbols which are extensions of the phallus--were put forward and used to conquer and destroy. For Adam Farrar, there is a kind of *jouissance* --pleasure in a sexual sense, no equivalent word in English--in war:

One of the main features of the phenomenology of war is the unique intensity of experience. War experience is exactly the converse of alienation. In war, the elimination of all the norms of intersubjectivity produces, not alienation, but the most intense *jouissance*. The machining of events on the plane of intensity (to use the Deleuzian image), the form of desire, is utterly transformed. Power no longer consists in the capacity to redeem the warrants of communicative intersubjectivity. It consists in the ability of the spear, the sword, the gun, napalm, the bomb etc. to manifest 'in a blast of sound and energy and light' (or in another time, in the blood of a severed limb or a disembowelled body), the merest 'wish flashing across your mind like a shadow'¹.

¹Adam Farrar, "War, Machining Male Desire," *War/Masculinity* (ed. Paul Patton, Ross Poole, Sydney: Intervention) p. 66.

Farrar continues, quoting an article by William Broyles in *Esquire* entitled "Why Men Love War," that it is at some terrible level, for men, the closest thing to what childbirth is for women: the initiation into the power of life and death².

In Arab society, most sexual relations are not built on pleasure, tenderness or love, but on reproduction, the preservation of girl's virginity (so-called 'honour' of the family), the confinement and control of women for the increase in male prestige, and the overestimation of the penis. Many important studies by women and men in the last few years see a link between sexuality and national/international conflicts. In an article published in an important French review entitled *Alternatives Non-Violentes*, Jean-William Lapierre, well-known specialist on the subject, sees a real "deep connection between masculine predominance and the importance of war³." According to him, most civilizations are based on conquest and war. "The importance of hunting, then of war in social existence, in economic resources, in cultural models (which valorise the warrior exploits), are at the roots of masculine domination and of women's oppression⁴." He explains how in so-called "modern" societies, politics, industry, business, are always a kind of war where one (mostly men, and sometimes women imitating men's behaviour) must be energetic, aggressive, etc., to be powerful. It is not only capitalist societies which "carry war like clouds carry the storm, but productivism in all its forms, including the so-called 'socialistic' one. In all societies in which economy and politics require a spirit of competition (while its ethic exalts it) women are oppressed⁵." And Bob Connell sees a relationship between masculinity, violence and war. He says that it is not by chance if the great majority of soldiers are men--of the 22 million people under arms in the world in 1976, 20 million of them were men. "Most of the police, most of the prison warders, and almost all the generals, admirals, bureaucrats and politicians who control the apparatus of coercion and collective violence. Most murderers are men. Almost all bandits, armed robbers, and muggers are men; all rapists, most domestic bashers; and most people involved in street brawls, riots and the like⁶." But such connection should not be attributed to biology that would absolve masculine responsibility--men's violence associated to some human "destiny"--but rather to social and cultural factors.

The discussion of sexuality and its relationship to political and social conflicts is also silenced through women's unquestioning adherence to dogmatic political systems of thinking. Many nationalist and leftist women felt that women should rally behind the already existing movements and ideologies. Yet in these movements, traditional morality often filters through dogmas, setting new barriers between women's sense of obligation and

their search for truth and freedom. Yolla Polity-Charara provides an incisive analysis of this problem as exemplified in Lebanese politics. According to her, many Lebanese women joined political parties thinking that the condition of women would change. But "how could it be possible with so many ideological differences and antagonisms, representing the whole range of political forces in Lebanon, not to be divergent on the details of women's demands⁷." According to Charara, the party and ideological loyalties made women loath to complain about their fate to other unknown women, and even more so to rivals. The militants among them, when conscious of the discrimination women faced, when they were not themselves token-women in the party, preferred to wash their dirty laundry within the family; they refused to question publicly the men of their party, to admit that their men were not the most advanced, the most egalitarian and the most revolutionary. Thus, in such a context, loyalty and siding with a group became more important than the issues themselves.

Betty Reardon explains how the patriarchal system is not only happy with dividing women along loyalty lines, but uses violence to train people into gender roles which reinforce the war system:

The fundamental willingness to use violence against others on which warfare depends is conditioned by early training and continuous socialization in patriarchal society. All are taught to respect authority, that is, fear violence... Boys and men are encouraged to become more fierce, more aggressive when they feel fear. Fear in men is channelled into aggression, in women into submission, for such behaviours are necessary to maintain patriarchal authoritarianism. Aggression and submission are also the core of the basic relations between men and women, accounting, many believe, for women's toleration of male chauvinism. Some assert that these behaviours are the primary cause of all forceful exploitation, and account for perhaps the most significant common characteristic of sexism and the war system: rape⁸.

Issa Makhoulouf in his book, *Beirut or The Fascination with Death*, talks and analyzes rape in the war of Lebanon, a subject no one before him had been willing to expose. He says that it is another facet of the Barbary, frequently practiced by militias during massacres and occurring almost everywhere on Lebanese soil.

The fixation of militias on sexual organs did not only hit women. Several male cadavers were discovered with their sex cut off and sometimes pushed into their mouths; the simulation of fellatio, generally repressed by morality, is very revealing as a rejection of moral codes. On the other hand, numerous mutilations were practiced on victims, dead or alive. In rape, all forms of violence are combined. All possibilities of death and pleasure are

²Ibid., p. 61.

³Lapierre, «Femmes: Une oppression millénaire.» *Alternatives non-violentes: Femmes et violences* 40 (Spring 1981) p. 21.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 22.

⁶Bob Connell, "Masculinity, Violence and War," *War/Masculinity*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁷Yolla Polity Charara, "Women and Politics in Lebanon," *Third World, Second Sex* (op. cit.) pp. 19-29.

⁸Reardon, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

present. All dreams of domination are fulfilled. The victim of rape is the toy of all phantasms and ambitions. Rape is the place of all experimentations⁹.

Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will* has shown how rape is a conscious tactic of warfare¹⁰. Michel Foucault has written a great deal on the connection between death, sex, violence and male sexuality¹¹. Wilhelm Reich has analyzed how repressed sexuality based on authoritarian family patterns is at the root of sadistic murders, perversions, psychological problems, social and political conflicts¹². And Farrar notices that: "War is a paradigm of masculinist practices because its pre-eminent valuation of violence and destruction resonates throughout other male relationships: relationships to other cultures, to the environment and, particularly, to women. If the 'masculinism' of war is the explanation for its intractability, then we must follow this path to its conclusion, wherever that may be¹³."

The whole system must be changed and rethought. To use Betty Reardon's words:

What I am advocating here is a new world order value, reconciliation, and perhaps even forgiveness, not only of those who trespass against us, but primarily of ourselves. By understanding that no human being is totally incapable of the most reprehensible of human acts, or of the most selfless and noble, we open up the possibilities for change of cosmic dimensions. Essentially this realization is what lies at the base of the philosophy of non-violence. If we are to move through a disarmed world to a truly non-violent one, to authentic peace and justice, we must come to terms with and accept the other in ourselves, be it our masculine or our feminine attributes or any of those traits and characteristics we have projected on enemies and criminals, or heroes and saints¹⁴.

And as Andrea Dworkin put it: "To transform the world we must transform the very substance of our erotic sensibilities and we must do so as consciously and as conscientiously as we do any act which involves our whole lives¹⁵."

By sexual revolution, I mean one which starts at the personal level, with a transformation of attitudes towards one's mate, family, sexuality, and society; specifically, a transformation of the traditional relations of domination and subordination which permeate interpersonal relationships, particularly those of sexual and familial intimacy. We need to develop an exchange of love, tenderness, equal sharing and recognition among people. This would create a more secure and solid basis for change in other spheres of life--political, economic, social, religious, and national, as they are often characterized by similar rapports of domination. As Elisabeth Badinter insightfully expressed:

Equality, which is taking place, gives birth to likeness which stops war. Each protagonist wanting to be the 'whole' of humanity, can better understand the Other who has become his/her double. The feelings which unite this couple of mutants can only change in nature. Strangeness disappears, replaced by 'familiarity'. We may lose some passion and desire, but gain tenderness and complicity, the feelings which unite members of the same family: a mother to her child, a brother to his sister... At last, all those who have dropped their weapons¹⁶.

The similarities and differences between the ways women and men express and deal with violence and sexuality can lead us to a greater comprehension of the complexities in the relationship between the two and bring us to a solution: i.e. a new rapport between men/women, women/women, and men/men, relationships based on trust, recognition of the other, tenderness, equal sharing and love void of jealousy and possession. My contention--going along with the cherished vision of Feminists--that the personal is the political, changes in relationships traditionally based on domination, oppression and power games will inevitably bounce back on other spheres of life.

Examples from the Lebanese War Novels

I will quote two passages from two Lebanese war novels, and you can guess which one was written by the woman and which by the man:

And this city, what is it? A whore. Who could imagine a whore sleeping with a thousand men and continuing to live? The city receives a thousand bombs and continues its existence nonetheless. The city can be summarized by these bombs... When we had destroyed Beirut, we thought we had destroyed it... We had destroyed this city at last. But when the war was declared finished and the pictures of the incredible desolation of Beirut were broadcasted, we discovered we had not destroyed it. We had only opened a few breaches in its walls, without destroying it. For that, other wars would be necessary.

This city is like a great suffering being, too mad, too overcharged, broken now, gutted, and raped like those girls raped by thirty or forty militia men, and are now mad and in asylums because their families, Mediterranean to the end, would rather hide than cure...but how does one cure the memory? The city, like those girls, was raped...In the City, this center of all prostitutions, there is a lot of money and a lot of construction that will never be finished. Cement has mixed with the earth, and little by little has smothered most of the trees. If not all.

In these two images of Beirut, two opposing feelings are being expressed, two contrasting visions emerge. The first wants to get rid of the sinner, the whore, source of all evils, decadence, and the

⁹Issa Makhoul, *Beyrouth ou la fascination de la mort* (Paris: La Passion, 1988) pp. 88-90.

¹⁰Susan Brownmiller, *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Bantam, 1976).

¹¹See in particular Michel Foucault, "Tales of Murder," I, Pierre Rivière (Penguin, 1978).

¹²Wilhelm Reich, *L'irruption de la morale sexuelle* (Paris: Payot, 1972, first published in German in 1932).

¹³Farrar, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁴Betty Reardon, *Sexism and the War System* (New York/London: Teacher's College/Columbia University, 1985) p. 94.

¹⁵Andrea Dworkin, *Marx and Gandhi were Liberals: Feminism and the 'Radical' Left* (CA: Frog in the Well, 1980) p. 6.

¹⁶Elisabeth Badinter, *L'un est l'autre: Des relations entre hommes et femmes* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1986) p. 245.

problems of modern existence. The total and violent destruction of the woman is seen as the only way out of an inextricable situation. The second feels sorry for the woman, the city, victim of rape, victim of man's violence. Mediterranean customs are accused. Hypocrisy and the oppression of women are presented as the origin of madness and the destruction of the city.

The first quote is by a man, Elias Khoury, author of *The Small Mountain* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990)¹⁷, the second by a woman, Etel Adnan, author of *Sitt Marie Rose* (Sausalito, Calif.: Post-Apollo Press, 1982)¹⁸. This difference between a man and a woman's visions of Beirut and their ways of expressing them was even more clearly defined one year during the war, as I watched women friends, determined to cross Beirut two or three times a week, pass through the demarcation line--the most desolate, depressing and often dangerous spot in the city. They went most of the time on foot, as only a few cars with special permission were allowed through. They were convinced that by this gesture, real as well as symbolic, Lebanon's reunification would take place. They did this against all logic, under the ironic and sometimes admiring look of male companions¹⁹. Defying weapons, militias, political games, women friends told me how that site had become a meeting place where each morning they looked forward to seeing this friend or that one, walking steadfastly in the apocalyptic space of the museum passage (another name for the no man's land dividing the city, because the museum is located there). They smiled at each other as they walked assuredly, conscious that their march was not an ordinary one, that their crossing was a daring act, important and vital to Lebanon's survival.

I have chosen six novels about the war to illustrate the connections between sexuality, war, nationalism, feminism, violence, love and power as they relate to the body, the partner, the family, Marxism, religion, and pacifism. These novels do not necessarily represent the entire range of creative works about the war²⁰. They were chosen for their significance in terms of the issues under discussion and for their availability in languages understandable to the Western reader. The works, originally written in Arabic or French, are by Lebanese women and men authors who have lived or are still living in Lebanon. All of the novels chosen are set in Beirut, in the context of the war. *Days of Dust* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1983)²¹ by Halim Barakat and *Death in Beirut* (London: Heineman, 1976)²² by Tawfiq Awwad--works written before the war started in 1975--foreshadow the events. Even though the subject is treated differently, all of the writers show how war and violence have roots in sexuality and in the treatment

of women in that part of the world. Most of the characters meet a tragic fate due to the war, but women are the principal victims of both political and social violence. For example, the heroine of *Death in Beirut* is seduced, raped, beaten, her face slashed, her ambitions smashed, as she tries to gain autonomy and education in the midst of her country's social and political unrest. Zahra, in *The Story of Zahra* (London: Readers International, Quartet Books Limited, 1986)²³ by Hanan El-Cheikh, who tries to find a way out of herself and of the civil war that has just erupted by having a sexual relationship with a sniper, becomes the target not only of his sexual weapon, but of his Kalashnikov as well. In the end, he kills her. In Etel Adnan's novel *Sitt Marie Rose*, Marie Rose is struggling for social justice, Arab women's liberation, and directs a school for the handicapped. She is put to death by Phalangist executioners who first torture her to get rid of their bad conscience. In *House without Roots* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985)²⁴ by Andrée Chedid, Sybil dies from a sniper's bullet at the point of possible reconciliation, the place where Kalya advanced trying to save Ammal and Myriam, one of them having been hit by the sniper's death machine as they were starting a peace march. In *Days of Dust*, Pamela, trying to find herself by helping the refugees and protesting against American imperialism, loses herself in a no-exit relationship with the male protagonist. And in Elias Khoury's novel *The Small Mountain*, the female characters are destroyed, disappear, or are trapped in disgustingly hateful marriage routines.

In addition to the relationship between war and sexuality, I examined the positive and negative actions and resolutions male and female characters took, the differences and similarities between male and female protagonists, between male and female authors, and between those writing in Arabic and in French. I also tried to assess the necessary changes Lebanon had to undergo to solve its tragedy and play, once again, the democratic role--melting pot of tolerance and freedom--it had in the region, and which is so much needed in that part of the world.

In this study, my hypothesis was verified and showed that although both female and male novels make the connection between sexuality and war, their ways of expressing it, and most of all the solutions implied, are quite different. Women writers paint the war and the relationships between women, men and their families in the darkest terms: sexuality is tied to women's oppression and the restrictions put on their lives, the war brings destruction, despair and death. The female protagonists look for alternatives in non-violent active struggles such as peace marches, engagement in causes to help the oppressed and the dispossessed.

¹⁷First written in Arabic (Al-Jabal al-Saghir, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Abhath, 1977) also available in French (La petite montagne, Paris: Arléa, 1987).

¹⁸First written in French (Sitt Marie-Rose, Paris: Des Femmes, 1977).

¹⁹There are also men who, believing in the reunification of Lebanon, make the gesture, crossing the demarcation line, but it seemed to me they were fewer than women--perhaps because men risk more, are more often victims of kidnappings, assaults, murders. Men do it more in a spirit of duty or for professional interests.

²⁰Cooke, op. cit.

²¹First written in Arabic ('Awdat alta'ir ilal bahr, Beirut: Al'Mu'assasat Al-'Arabiya, 1969), also available in French (Le vaisseau reprend le large, Sherbrooke: Naaman, 1977).

²²First written in Arabic (Tawaheen Beirut, Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1972).

²³First written in Arabic (Hikayat Zahra, Beirut: Al-Nahar, 1980), also available in French (Histoire de Zahra, Paris: Lattès, 1980).

²⁴First written in French (La maison sans racines, Paris: Flammarion, 1985) also available in English (Return to Beirut, London: Serpent's Tail, 1989):

At the same time, they seek for changes in their life styles and in their relationships with the men and families around them. Men writers also paint the war and men/women relationships in the bleakest terms, emphasizing the connection between the two. But their depression does not lead them to search for alternatives different from the historically accepted ones: heroism, revenge and violence as catharsis to men/women deplorable communication.

In both women's and men's writing, the war is used to break down the patriarchal system and the traditional order. The female protagonists do it through masochism while the male ones use cruelty and sadism. But such action/reaction leads nowhere because the use of war to free oneself from domination and oppression only reinforces the authoritarian order by reproducing the power structure with different colours.

Both women and men writers question God and the use of religion in war. Institutionalized religion is blamed explicitly, while faith and personal belief are praised implicitly and constitute--more specifically in the women writers--strength and a way of overcoming war. So while male protagonists justify their fighting through religion or to show how it was used for imperialist purposes, the female ones draw their strength in helping the oppressed, sacrificing themselves for others welfare and in active non-violent struggles.

Both women and men writers seem to concur in showing female protagonists whose political outlook and actions are accompanied by similar ways in their personal lives, while male protagonists live double standards and hypocritical attitudes. In male authors, the female protagonists who are concerned and active politically also reject the traditional passive roles and refuse the taboos surrounding virginity and sexuality. They find themselves in situations where they are unable to live this conscious desire to be free because the men around them cannot cope with it. The irony is that these men voice beautiful statements concerning the need to achieve revolution in both domains: the private and the political, but when it comes to actualizing these theories in interpersonal relationships, it is as if they were paralyzed. It leads one to really doubt the effectiveness of what they advocate. Both male and female authors agree in portraying this difference between their male and female protagonists. To this characterization, women authors add an element not found in the men: their female protagonists often affirm themselves and live different life styles even if it means being marginalized, having to live in exile or being put to death.

Another major preoccupation of female and male writers is their outlook on multiculturalism and the question of roots, exile and pluralism mixed with violence and war, and how it is reflected in interpersonal relationships. Female authors tend to see mixity as something positive. Exile often means freedom. The search for roots can be an expression of nostalgia for one's childhood or a need for security and love. Male authors tend to depict mixity as confrontation. Their search is for purity, mixity meaning dishonour. Multiculturalism increases their schizophrenia and makes them

uneasy and depressed. Roots are a search for identity and exile is a terrible fate.

For example, Kalya in *House Without Roots*, raises questions about the significance of roots, and expresses the importance of grafting within her all the various roots and sensitivities of the cultures she is made of. She insists on the positive aspects of such hybridization and cosmopolitanism, and the enrichment, tolerance and openness it brings. These values are what Lebanon used to represent and what Kalya had come to seek. While Ramzy in *Days of Dust*, despairs at multiplicity which he associates with loss of identity, and sees it as one of the causes for the war. Ramzy is constantly split between East and West. It leads to schizophrenia and the inability to harmoniously integrate the various sides of his personality.

Intercultural and interconfessional marriages reflect the same outlook. Women authors depict female protagonists who live them harmoniously and with a great sense of achievement, commitment and possible solution to the war (even when they get killed because of it as with Marie Rose). Men authors show male protagonists split between a desire to achieve mixity on the political level and an impossibility to live it in their personal lives, even when they have voiced the importance of breaking down tradition on that level. Men authors also depict female protagonists better able to harmonize the personal with the political. Their failure to achieve true liberation stems not from their lack of action, but from the males' inability to realize it with them.

Another notion implied by both female and male novels is androgyny. In this domain, there is less contrast between the two genders. Both women and men authors depict the negative and positive aspects of androgyny. Adnan refers to an androgynous mythical past to confront the male protagonists with their corrupted values. Chedid shows women characters who assume traits traditionally viewed as masculine. And Awwad also portrays women who, in order to free themselves, take on a masculine discourse and decide to engage in guerilla warfare. In these two authors however, the outcome is not positive. It does not engender life, nor is it a solution to war. And Barakat's male protagonist who assumes both the female and male sides of his personality is not portrayed as having harmoniously integrated the two. He is constantly ill at ease and torn between aggressiveness and masochism, the male side being associated with victory and the female with defeat. The most positive portrayal of an androgynous character is in Khoury. One of the main protagonists is described as androgynous-looking and appears free from society's restrictions. She is obviously a projection of who the central male character would like to be, how he imagines freedom and a way to reject war. This androgynous-looking character laughs, argues, moves freely, captivates the hero, runs towards the sea, and is unattainable because the man is too busy fighting "the revolution." Why did the author choose to construct an androgynous-looking woman to represent freedom? Is he saying that woman and man are doomed to destroy each other

and that only the androgynous can escape such fate? The novel as a whole does not seem to imply such a solution. Freedom is never chosen as the answer to men and women's miseries. Instead, destruction appears as the ultimate response to human condition.

The question of poverty and class-consciousness related to war and women's condition emphasizes women writers' awareness, leading them to search for positive alternatives, while men writers use it to justify violence. Both male and female authors show the link between the fate of the dispossessed, their struggle to overcome it, women's oppression and the war. Awwad paints a direct connection between the classes his female protagonists belong to and the degrees of abuse and violence they are subjected to. Chedid shows women characters whose private and political consciousness and commitment gives them real awareness and sensitivity to the condition of the poor and vice versa: watching the poor's lives leads them to become socially committed and active for change in their personal as well as political lives. Similarly, Adnan portrays a female protagonist who is socially, politically and personally committed to women's issues and to the fate of the poor, the dispossessed and the oppressed in general. As for Khoury, he often talks about "the war of the poor" to describe the link between oppression and war, and to justify a revenge of the dispossessed. The crowd, which invades the plush hotel district of Beirut, is coming from camps, ghettos and the poor areas of Lebanon. Khoury ironically recalls the name they walk on "France" (there is such a street in Beirut), to show it is also a revenge of the colonized against the colonizers.

Both male and female authors paint the disastrous consequences of virginity rites connected with the notions of honour, ownership of women and sexual relationships. It is these customs, which lead Al-Shaykh's female protagonist to despair, madness and final death. She rejects them from the beginning and is revolted against male's views of her body and sexuality. She would like to be freed from them and in control of her body and of her life. She uses the war to break down the taboos and to assert herself sexually. She finds out that the war is much stronger and more destructive than anything she has known before, and that the customs she hoped to get rid of through it are only temporarily shifted. They come back with greater strength and more destructive violence. And Adnan uses the narrator's voice to comment on the frighteningly dangerous outcome of the codes of honour related to virginity, and how they reinforce tribal confessional sectarianism. As for Awwad, he shows the direct link between the customs of virginity, the exclusive propriety of women leading to violence and crimes at the foundation of a society built on divisions and an exclusive sense of propriety. In such a system, women are dominated, raped, led to suicide or killed by men themselves manipulated by political power. It is a vicious circle of power struggles in which women are the ultimate victims. And Barakat, through the interwoven stories of the Hyena and the Flying Dutchman, demonstrates the importance of the concept of virginity and the codes of honour related to women's roles in society, with the strong implications of woman as earth, and Palestine as the ultimate woman.

In most of the novels under study, the codes of honour--related to virginity and to crimes meant to wash the family's or tribe's honour/pride in blood--are connected to rape, itself associated with death. Rape is linked to the notion of death. It is the absolute forbidden (specially on women of one's tribe) therefore the absolute temptation of death (when inflicted on women of the other tribe). Men prove their masculinity through sexual acts of violence against women of the other clans. It, therefore, reinforces the system of the clan by making women vulnerable and in need of the men's protection. In Al-Shaykh, the major female protagonist is subjected to rapes throughout her sexual life, which ends with death as the ultimate rape. In Awwad, the sexual act, in most of the men's imagination and in their practice, is associated with rape. They seem unable to conceive of it differently; it is part of the system of power where they prove their masculinity and domination. Their way of conceiving sexuality often results in the death, suicide or annihilation of the female protagonist. And in Khoury, the wish of the central male protagonist is for the city/woman to be raped because she is like a prostitute and incarnates all the decadent moral values of industrial and modern life. But rape is not enough, it has to reach its limits into total destruction, and the devastation has to spread to other cities/women in the world, leading to annihilation and oblivion. While in Adnan, who also compares the city to a woman, she sees her rape/destruction as men's ultimate cruelty, sadism and violence. She feels sorry for this woman/city and seeks for solutions in peaceful non-violent alternatives, even in the notion of self-sacrifice if that could help alleviate the hate and destruction. As for Barakat, the images used for the Arabs' being defeated by Israel are of invasion, destruction and rape, taking place on the male protagonist's body that is utterly frustrated and depressed because rendered powerless.

Sexual relations conceived in a system of power struggles and a structure of submission/domination will obviously result in rapes and in the abuse of women. Rapes are associated with unwanted pregnancies and abortions. In none of the war novels do we find conception, pregnancy and giving birth as something positive and happy. Both female and male authors seem to view life conception and creation as impossible and repulsive in the context of the war. The female protagonists are the ones who pay the price, because the male protagonists view women as having to assume the whole responsibility of contraception and pregnancy. The sexual act being, in most instances, one of rape and domination, women appear as mere objects of possession, vessels into which the men pour their anger and frustration, prolongation of the feelings and acts of war. Abortion is the direct result of rape, like destruction is the direct result of war. Life cannot be engendered in such a context.

The novels by both male and female authors end with the brutal death of some of the female protagonists. Their death is the direct result of the male protagonist's violence, worse perpetrators of the war. Zahra and the child in her womb die from the sniper's--and father of the child--bullet. A gang of young Christian militiamen executes Marie Rose. Young Sybil also dies from a sniper's bullet.

Zennoub is cruelly gang raped and, as a result, she commits suicide. While Miss Mary, who shows real solidarity for her female friends, and who tries to protect Tamima dies, shielding her from her brother's cruel hand. In only one of the male author's novel, one of the male protagonists dies. It is from fighting and one does not feel as sorry for him as with the female protagonists' deaths. His death is the result of his own violence and not a cruelty inflicted from the outside as with the women. Even if violence coming from the oppressed holds a certain justification, the death of its victims does not stir our sympathy, as does the death of innocent victims. In all of the studied novels, female and male authors concur in portraying their female protagonists as the ultimate victims. Where they disagree is in showing their responsibility and/or innocence. Khoury is the one who holds women responsible for their own victimization. His rage against the victims is so great that he calls for their total destruction. It is as if he were blaming the oppressed for being oppressed and calling for more oppression to get rid of oppression. Fanon's view of violence as catharsis can be compared to Khoury's call for total annihilation. They both call on negative, destructive means for the transformation of society. There is a similar element in Al-Shaykh's novel where Zahra who goes to the sniper seeks a homeopathic cure against the war. The difference between Khoury and Al-Shaykh is that Zahra does it through masochism, thereby emphasizing her own victimization, while Khoury inflicts it through sadism, thereby increasing the cruelty and expressing a total lack of compassion for the victims.

Finally, an obvious conclusion to this study is that the fear men have of women leads them to domination and war, while the fear women have of men's violence leads them to masochistic submission or/and rejection of the men, and commitment to political, human and feminist causes. Both the female and male authors agree on this. For example, the sniper's first reaction to Zahra is rape, as a way of proving his masculinity through control and domination. Fear is one of his primary motivations: fear of life, fear of women's capacity to reproduce, to give birth, fascination with death and destruction. He does not want to assume the responsibility of the life he has engendered in Zahra's womb, when he daily kills innocent victims and destroys life. In order to re-establish the chaos, daily drug and only meaning of his existence, he must kill her. And for Talal in *The Small Mountain*, fighting is like making love to a woman: it is frightening and never fulfilling. The author describes a group of fighters who have lost the meaning of life, a fraternity of men always afraid, attracted and repulsed by women and by war, who know only destruction in which they lose themselves. The hate and fear they feel for women becomes their ultimate motivation for war. Such fear is epitomized by the relationship the central character has with his wife. The author describes boredom and weariness in their relationship, thereby trying to justify the need for war to bring about necessary changes. The main character has an obvious fascination with death and destruction, which is closely related to his sense of pleasure. He is chained to his wife through habits he can only destroy through war. And he runs away from the other two women in his life, because

they represent life and freedom, which he is unable to accept, busy as he is with destruction. It leads to an obsession with destruction, as if destroying the city and the woman it symbolizes brings in ultimate jouissance. And Zahra, afraid of the violence ripping her country apart, submits herself masochistically to one of its worse perpetrators, thereby hoping to overcome her fears. While the central women characters, in *House Without Roots*, live their lives independent from men and with a commitment to bring about the transformation of society through peaceful means. And Marie-Rose stands in front of the fascist young men of her country, confronting them with their perverted values, in an act that defies their violence and rejects them all together. This chabab gang is afraid of Marie-Rose who epitomizes feminine/feminist values and who dares confront them with words, showing them their corruption while asserting her w-humanism and her commitment to the oppressed and the downtrodden. They will have to get rid of her, just like the sniper had to get rid of Zahra.

Thus, while women writers are finding a way out, a circle of hell is being perpetuated, each sex fearing the other, the male one starting the chain through violence and domination. Only a different vision, new actions, and altered relationships based on trust, recognition, and acceptance of the other can help heal the wounds and bring about the cure necessary to project a new future for the world. Such a change has already started taking place with personal and political actions aimed at solving the problems rooted in oppression, domination, and the victimization of women. Writing this article has been one of these actions.

The connection between sexuality and war is so present in the novels that it is probably one of the most evident unifying themes. It demonstrates how strongly at work it is in the collective imaginary or culture of the people and how central it is to an understanding of the situation and the causes of the war. The similarities and differences between the ways women and men express and deal with violence and sexuality can lead us to a greater comprehension of the complexities in the relationship between the two and bring us closer to a solution: i.e., what I have described throughout this study as the need for a new rapport between men/women, women/women, and men/men, relationships based on trust, recognition of the other, tenderness, equal sharing and love void of jealousy and possession. My contention being that the personal is political--a vision also dear to Feminist movements--changes in relationships traditionally based on domination, oppression and power games will inevitably bounce back on other spheres of life.

What Miriam Cooke writes about the Lebanese women writers' vision of Lebanon as a sick child in need of care, became for me a reality. It was the Lebanese war, which made me want to go back and try to help. I would not have felt the same concern for Lebanon had it not been for the war and for what I perceived as real suffering in my friends and many of the people I came in contact with. I shared their pain and desire to remedy. It led me to apply for grants to go and teach there. My experiences in living the war, talking with students, teaching, conducting research, travelling in Lebanon,

crossing the demarcation line dividing the city, participating in non-violent peace initiatives, spending time in the shelter when shelling became too violent, sharing the anguish and suffering of friends and relatives, gave me insights I might not have had otherwise. It led to a conviction that only peaceful means could bring about a solution to Lebanon and reunite the country. It also showed me the importance of activism for the transformation of society: peace marches, hunger strikes, consciousness raising groups, solidarity among women, singing, writing, crossing the divided city, and most of all, changing the system of rapport between men and women, the values connected with these relations and the confessional structures tied to the concepts of honour, virginity, exclusive property and oppression.

It also became very clear to me that women's solidarity and an international feminism, uniting women all over the world, are vital in bringing about such changes. I would like to stress the importance of achieving unity in the midst of cultural differences, if we want to provide some hope in ending the war culture which exists all over the world. I became very aware, when in Lebanon, of the strength the peace initiative started by two women from enemy communities had, first on women, and then on the population as a whole, in uniting people towards peace. It is one of the rare times in my life I witnessed the tremendous impact, which values of love and tolerance can have on people.


The activities I have described above--such as going to Lebanon, teaching, researching, living the war, crossing the demarcation line, participating in non-violent peace initiatives, discussing with students and with people directly affected by the war, writing a novel about it, composing songs on the war and performing them in public--undertaken as a result of my concern and suffering over the destruction of my country, are directly involved with the transformation of society. Changing the system and the values behind it requires more time and a long process of in-depth political, economical, psychological, religious, sexual, familial and social transformations established on an understanding of the different factors, causes and links between these various fields. My concern over long range plans to bring about social transformations

necessary to end the war system and bring about hopeful and lasting changes to a world falling apart made me undertake this study and analyze the relationship between sexuality, war and literature.

When the English version of my novel *The Excised* was going into its second edition in 1994, I found myself being faced with mastectomy or lumpectomy, having being diagnosed with breast cancer. These two ectomies are lived by an increasing number of women all over the world, and particularly in the United States. It is the price we pay for modern civilization. The pollution, pesticides, depletion of the ozone layer, nuclear disasters, oestrogen induced carcinogens, mistreatment of nature are finally catching up with us. As Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi well expresses in an article untitled, "Ectomies: A treasury of Juju Fiction by Africa's Daughters," "Cultural determinism becomes the focal point of the politics of ectomy: to cut or not to cut? The mind boggles at Western culture's playing on women's bodies: hysterectomies, oophorectomies or ovariectomies, salpingectomies, episiotomies, mastectomies... I envision ectomy as a trope to express the excision, the cutting off, the exclusion attached to woman's destiny²⁵." I was too overwhelmed by emotions, fears, anguish, rage, but also a renewed sense of the urgency, beauty and cruelty of life to be able to express what I was going through at the time, except in my journal. My journal became a publication: *The Wounded Breast: Intimate Journeys through Cancer*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press, July 2001, 543 pages (available as e-book on www.spinifex.com). *Voyages en Cancer* (Préface Yves Velan). Paris: L'Harmattan, Tunis: Aloès, Beirut: An-Nahar, 2000, 448 pages. Phénix Prize 2001. The link that ties me to all the women around the world was being reinforced in this tribulation and sorrow.

In conclusion I would like to point out that those who suffer the most in wars and violent conflicts are women. They not only bleed from the devastations caused by wars and armed conflicts, often through rapes, torture and death, but they are also often crushed and rendered silent through practices such as crimes of honour, beatings, veils and confinement. It has become urgent to link all these various traumas of our time in order to gain better insights in how to solve them.

²⁵Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Ectomies: A treasury of Juju Fiction by Africa's Daughters," pp.4-5 (Forthcoming article).

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