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Decolonizing Female Archetypes: Creating an Oppositional Consciousness in Contemporary Chicana and Iraqi Women's Fiction

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Decolonizing Female Archetypes: Creating an Oppositional Consciousness in Contemporary Chicana and Iraqi Women's Fiction

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

by

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Abstract

In dominant imperialist discourses, women, such as Iraqi women and Chicanas, have been marginalized in political, social and economic structures and have been manipulated to maintain imperialist exploitation and processes. They have been frozen within certain archetypal configurations. Iraqi women have been misrepresented as victims of their culture and traditions, and Chicanas have been represented in derogatory terms or excluded from mainstream hierarchies of representation. This study examines some counternarratives and oppositional subjectivities/consciousnesses provided by Iraqi and Chicana women writers through their utilization of the legacy of a number of fictional and historical female figures. The primary texts analyzed in this study are *Tashari (Dispersed)* (2013) by Ina'am Kachachi, *Al- 'yūn al Sūd (The Black Eyes)* (2002) by Maysalun Hadi, "Shahrazad and Her Narrator" (1999) by Lutfiyya al-Dulaimi, *So Far from God* (1993) by Ana Castillo, and "Never Marry a Mexican" (1991) by Sandra Cisneros. The innovative use of female archetypes in these works both enriches the literary heritage and represents new subjectivities for Arab/Iraqi and Chicana women. The female cultural figures analyzed in this project are al-Khansa, Shahrazad, Zarqa al-Yamama, La Llorona, the *curandera*, and La Malinche. Each writer brings attention to positive aspects of these figures, focusing on their legacy as active subjects, discourse transmitters/creators, and protectors. This dissertation examines how female archetypes are reclaimed/ re-presented in Chicana and Iraqi literature to reflect new anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist subjectivities available to women while maintaining the rich cultural heritage of these figures in their respective cultural traditions. This reclamation/ re-presentation provides oppositional subjectivities that reveal Iraqi and Chicana women's day-to day experiences and ways of resistance and survival at times of loss, marginalization, and identity erasure/distortion.

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Last, but not least, I am grateful to my mother and sisters for their prayers and sympathy.

Dedication

To the soul of my late father, Salih Hussein, the man with the biggest and kindest heart. I will always keep you in my heart and commit to your legacy of kindness and mercifulness.

Table of Contents

Chapter One	1
Introduction.....	1
Description of the Female Figures/Archetypes:	2
1. Al-Khansa and La Llorona:	2
2. Shahrazad and La Malinche:.....	6
3. Zarqa al-Yamama and the Curandera:	10
The Purpose of the Study and Historical Background:.....	13
Methodology:	26
Chapter Overview:	27
Chapter Two.....	30
Loss and Melancholia in Iraqi and Chicana Fiction	30
Chapter Three:	60
Shahrazad and La Malinche: Transforming the Archetype	60
Chapter Four	89
Intuition, Healing, and Postcolonial Subjectivities.....	89
Chapter Five.....	115
Conclusion	115
Works Cited	120

Chapter One

Introduction

In dominant imperialist discourses, women, such as Iraqi women and Chicanas, have been marginalized in political, social, and economic structures and have been manipulated to maintain imperialist exploitation and processes. They have been frozen within certain archetypal configurations. Iraqi women have been misrepresented as victims of their culture and traditions, and Chicanas have been represented in derogatory terms or excluded from mainstream hierarchies of representation. This study examines some counternarratives and oppositional subjectivities/consciousnesses provided by Iraqi and Chicana women writers through their utilization of the legacy of a number of fictional and historical female figures. The primary texts analyzed in this study are *Tashari (Dispersed)* (2013) by Ina'am Kachachi, *Al- 'yūn al Sūd (The Black Eyes)* (2002) by Maysalun Hadi, "Shahrazad and Her Narrator" (1999) by Lutfiyya al-Dulaimi, *So Far from God* (1993) by Ana Castillo, and "Never Marry a Mexican" (1991) by Sandra Cisneros. The innovative use of female archetypes in these works both enriches the literary heritage and represents new subjectivities for Arab/Iraqi and Chicana women. The female cultural figures analyzed in this project are al-Khansa, Shahrazad, Zarqa al-Yamama, La Llorona, the *curandera*, and La Malinche. Each writer brings attention to positive aspects of these figures, focusing on their legacy as active subjects, discourse transmitters/creators, and protectors. This dissertation examines how female archetypes are reclaimed/ re-presented in Chicana and Iraqi literature to reflect new anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist subjectivities available to women while maintaining the rich cultural heritage of these figures in their respective cultural traditions. This reclamation/ re-presentation provides oppositional

subjectivities that reveal Iraqi and Chicana women's day-to day experiences and ways of resistance and survival at times of loss, marginalization, and identity erasure/distortion.

In her book, *Feminism Without Borders* (2003), Chandra Talpade Mohanty constructs the concept of the 'new woman' after the concept of the "new man" theorized by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). She defines this project of decolonization and the creation of the "new woman" as a radical feminist transformative project that changes the patriarchal, (neo)colonial, and capitalist systems "from the bottom up" (7-8). Mohanty's project of the "new woman" is important in constructing new knowledge about marginalized women. This knowledge results from decolonizing fixed hegemonic representations of these women and provides self-reflective definitions of identity and antihegemonic perception of oppressed women's subjectivities. These counter definitions and perceptions present new discourses of resistance anchored in the daily lives of misrepresented and marginalized women. Using this postcolonial feminist consciousness, I argue that the Iraqi/Arab and Chicana female archetypes/figures constitute a new narrative strategy that produces a counternarrative and an oppositional consciousness by constructing new subjectivities. In the selected texts, these archetypes/figures are revived as having active agencies: productive, survivors, knowledgeable, clairvoyants, and healers. This oppositional consciousness undermines the othering of Iraqi and Chicana women and reforms the reductionist image imposed on them by social, economic, and political systems of power.

Description of the Female Figures/Archetypes:

1. Al-Khansa and La Llorona:

Al-Khansa (meaning "the snub-nosed one," which has a positive connotation in Arab culture referring to a flat-nosed animal, the gazelle,) is a seventh-century Arab poet known for

her *marathi* (elegies) in which she mourned her two brothers. She was one of the poets of the Arabian Peninsula whose life bridged the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. She belonged to a noble nomadic tribe, Bani Sulaym, which was well known for its bravery in the battlefield and its mastery of Arab language and poetry recitation. Raised in such an environment, she acquired an ingenious poetic faculty which she employed to mourn the loss of her brothers, Mu'awiya and Sakhr, who died in tribal skirmishes, as well as the loss of the close-knit community in which she was raised. She was known for her willfulness and powerful personality: "The biographical anecdotes on her life describe a character of remarkable will, a strong personality, and a competitive spirit, with a penchant for poetry even before tragedy initiated her elegiac career" (Burt 2005). In one anecdote, she refuses to marry a man outside of her tribe, thereby demonstrating her strong personality, independence, and celebration of her own community (Burt 2005). She excelled in the male-dominated poetry competitions in which she took part and established an enduring reputation for competitiveness and poetical mastery. Khansa's legacy as a writer and a cultural figure has evoked different responses among modern Arab feminists. Some Arab feminist writers see in her a passive model of Arab women. In her article, "La li-Khansa al-Madi ("No to Khansa of the past")," Nuha Samara addresses Arab women activists saying, "Is the Khansa of the past also the Khansa of the present?" as a way of critiquing the lack of activism of Arab women during the first Gulf War. She protests against embracing Khansa's legacy and reducing Arab women's response to the political and social situation of the Arab world: "Have the roles of Arab women changed since the time of Khansa? Or do they still come and go in her place? Shouting jubilation when one of their children suffers martyrdom, ululating with their hearts black as night. Tearing their garments in their sorrow over the dear departed, and dancing with joy when they give birth to male heroes" (Samara 65; translated DeYoung 50).

Samara connects Khansa to passive submission to traditional models of Arab femininity and protests against embracing Khansa's legacy uncritically. In addition to Samara, Magda al-Nowaihi maintains that the prominence of Khansa as one of the famous pre-Islamic Arab poets is due to the fact that her elegies are centered around men, and they affirm Arab masculinity: "the criteria by which female poets were evaluated and judged were almost always put forth and applied by men" (479). Despite this critique that categorizes Khansa's poetry as male-centered, other Arab women writers, such as Zaynab Fawaz writing one hundred years ago, highlight the historical and literary importance of Khansa's elegies and her role as a *mukhadrama* (her life span extends from pre-Islamic times to the early era of Islam) who asserted her status as an independent female poet despite the projections of the new faith defenders (Hammond & Sajdi 230). Through close analysis of English texts written about Khansa, Hartman highlights the ways in which she is represented as an example of the oppressed Arab woman living in the desert. According to this discourse, her creativity makes her different from other Arab women during her time, rather than establishing her as the best in a broad tradition of women poets: "they do not show how she excelled from within her social context but rather imply that she somehow deviated or was estranged from it" (Hartman 20). Hartman also notes that many Western scholars stress that Khansa excelled in *ritha'*, arguing that women were more likely to excel in this genre because of its association with emotions, an analysis that conveniently dismisses Khansa's command of the literary form and her ingenious language and metaphors as somehow preordained by her gendered emotional constitution (24). Moreover, Khansa's elegies for her brothers are decontextualized to convey the idea that Arab women are merely pawns of Arab men. Her laments are read as evidence that she is dependent, lacks a mind of her own, and is controlled by oppressive Arab men (25). In another essay, "Gender, Genre, and the (Missing)

Gazelle: Arab Women Writers and the Politics of Translation,” Hartman critiques the perception of Khansa as “unhinged” and obsessed with laments, which overlooks the fact that she excelled in composing poetry even before her brothers’ deaths, and that her literary productions were situated within the institutional structure of Arabic poetry. Western scholars have described her love for her brother, Sakhr, as an “obsession” and “one-sided abnormality” (Hartman 29). In response, Hartman calls for a feminist translation that focuses on Khansa’s creativity and genuine poetic talent rather than depicting her as “unhinged.” Moreover, Khansa’s elegies were not just mere recitations of male heroism but rather lamentations of the loss of two intimate relationships as well as a celebration of her community and her tribe’s generosity and noble traits. She is not a mere passive woman mourning the loss of men; she has created a legacy that has influenced other elegists and left a rich heritage that reflected her strong agency. Major Arab women writers, such as A’isha Taymour (d.1902) and Fedwa Tuqan (d. 2003), incorporate her legacy in their literary productions; they also mourn the loss of their loved ones through composing elegies, alongside their other poetry.

In Chicana culture, the figure of La Llorona shares some similar traits with Khansa. La Llorona, the Mourner, grieves for the loss of her children and has become associated with hysteria and violence, attributes that have also been associated with Khansa and her poetry albeit in different ways. The legend of La Llorona centers around a young woman named Maria from a rural village in Latin America who is driven mad after her husband betrays her for a younger woman. Angry and hurt, she drowns her children, then commits suicide, or, in another version, dies of overwhelming grief. After death, she is not permitted to reach the afterlife until she finds her children. Thus, she returns from the afterlife as the white-clad spirit La Llorona, who haunts rivers and other inland bodies of water, doomed to wander the earth weeping and seeking her

children forever. As in the case of Khansa, the idea of grief-induced insanity has been manipulated by hegemonic discourses and presented as a characteristic essential to women. Chicana women writers have therefore had to decolonize the trope of the madwoman and its association with the emotional instability, reversing the myth of the monstrous woman and depicting her as the victim of male adultery and harmful patriarchal attitudes (Trevino 123). This new oppositional ideology vindicates Chicana women.

In addition, the figure of La Llorona is employed by these writers to symbolize the Chicana struggle against hegemonic ideologies that erase Indigenous identities and force Chicana peoples to embrace a colonial culture. La Llorona is “symbolic of Chicano culture, whose children are lost because of their assimilation into the dominant culture, or because of violence and prejudice...For Chicana writers, La Llorona represents mourning for their lost culture, their lost selves” (Rebolledo & River 149). Chicana writers employ La Llorona as an embodiment of Chicanas’ resistance to dominant patriarchal and colonial ideologies, and as a step toward the reclamation of their Indigenous identities. Chicana peoples have been doubly colonized: first by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, and then by the United States with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. These overlapping colonizations have enforced dichotomous sexist structures that cast women as inferior. Thus, in Chicana culture as in Arab culture, women writers have employed mourning women—La Llorona and Khansa, respectively—to create new subjectivities that mourn the loss of collective Indigenous identities and communities and defy the colonial ideologies that represent women as subordinate.

2. Shahrazad and La Malinche:

In addition to the stereotype of the mourning female figure, Arab and Chicana women writers have also sought to reclaim the stereotype of the passive or the seducing woman,

represented by the figures of Shahrazad in Arab culture and La Malinche in the Chicana culture. Both Shahrazad and Malinche are represented as passive or seductive. Shahrazad is the heroine of the *Thousand and One Nights*, which has often been translated and read in European and American discourses in ways that essentialize Arab women as passive and lacking agency in order to justify the colonial project in Arab lands. In the frame story of the *Nights*, Shahrazad, the Vazier's charming daughter, sacrifices herself and requests that her father allows her to risk marrying the ruthless and tyrannical sultan, Shahrayar, who has vowed to marry a young girl from his kingdom each night and execute her in the morning. Shahrazad employs her talent and wit in storytelling to entangle the sultan and distract him from his cruel intentions. Shahrazad's character and her tales have been fetishized and eroticized in Eurocentric discourses, and her intellectual and narrative powers have been reduced to sheer, male-centered sexual fantasies. This disparagement of Shahrazad's agency has resulted in dominant stereotypes that distort the image of Arab women in mainstream discourses and represent these women either as silent victims or as sensual seductresses. Arab women writers have sought to decolonize these representations and reclaim the figure of Shahrazad in a way that undermines the hegemonic representations of Arab women. Literary scholar Nawar al Hassan Golley uses the figure of Shahrazad to investigate the representation of female subjectivity and identity construction in a selection of autobiographical writings by Arab women. She deconstructs the stereotypical dichotomy of private/public, which allocates women's writings to the "private" sphere while assigning men's writings to the "public" and political sphere, in her analysis of Arab women's autobiographies. Arguing against the essential representation of Arab women as oppressed and submissive, Golley shows that "what is seen as unified from the outside may be very different within" (13). She is interested in voicing Arab women's heterogeneous subjectivities and

“encouraging a feminist voice that will end the silencing of women” (14). Golley explores to what extent the traces of Sharazadian storytelling can help Arab women express their own selfhood and highlight the sociopolitical importance of autobiographical narratives by writers such as Huda Sha’arawi, Fadwa Tuqan, and Nawal el-Saadawi. Susan Muaddi Darraj observes that Shahrazad was turned into “nothing more than a harem sex kitten” (2) by French and English translators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: “An intelligent woman, schooled in literature, philosophy, and history, reduced to an erotic, shallow, sex-crazed body behind a veil” (2). This, she argues, is what happened to Arab and Eastern women and archetypal figures in the hands of these European writers. In reality, she points out, Shahrazad’s voice “saved the nation and healed its king” (3). Darraj maintains that Shahrazad’s legacy continues to inspire many Arab American women writers as they reflect on issues that face them in liminal and transcultural spaces.

Hanadi al-Samman uses the trope of Shahrazad, along with the trope of *al-maw’ūdah* (a pre-Islamic ritual of female infanticide, *wa’d al banāt*, for the fear of dishonor, a deed which was condemned in the Qur’an during the Islamic era), to convey how contemporary Arab women writers in diaspora (Paris and London) use these cultural tropes to “defy conventional narratives of personal and national erasure” (3). Al-Samman explores how these writers convert representations of these iconic cultural motifs into active political engagement, and she focuses on the importance of these tropes in healing after personal and national traumas: “At the hands of contemporary diaspora women writers, the Shahrazad of today is not interested in liberating women from real or imaginary veils; rather, she is determined to demolish the walls of local and global oppression that silence Arab females and males alike” (254). She states that these tropes are not limited to the local feminist struggle; they transcend the borders of the local and the

personal to reach global and diverse struggles and traumas and constitute therapy through reengagement with historical motifs. On the other hand, some Arab writers see Shahrazad herself, and not just the distorted representations of her circulated by colonial discourses, as problematic. Joumana Haddad starts her essay “I Killed Shahrazad” by saying, “I’ve never been a big fan of Shahrazad” (141). She rejects the scheme of “bribing the man” with her stories because it keeps women in the “compromising, inferior” position (142), and does not teach resistance and rebellion. Haddad considers the idea of bribing the man a deviation from Arab women’s endeavor to resist oppressive entities and ideologies. Haddad’s decision to “kill” Shahrazad is a response to the societal oppression that Arab women face as well as to the Western cliché of the oppressed Arab woman.

As stated previously, the historically based figure of La Malinche has some parallels to the fictional Shahrazad. Just as the latter is stereotyped as submissive or seductive, La Malinche is also a controversial female figure accused of being a seductress and traitor/ passive. La Malinche/ Malintzin/ Dona Marina was born in 1502 to a privileged Aztec family who lived in Coatzacochoas, a pre-Colombian Mexican province by the Gulf Coast, and later exiled. She was given a more respectful name, Malintzin, by her tribe before being sold into slavery by her mother (Torres 43). She subsequently became a guide and interpreter for the Spanish leader Hernán Cortés during the Spanish-Aztec War (1519-21) because of her multilingual faculty (she spoke Nahuatl and Maya as well as Spanish) and the discursive intelligence that she developed during her several exiles. Because of her beauty and intelligence, Cortés chose her as his mistress, and she gave birth to his son, Martín, who is considered one of the first Mestizos (mixed-blood: European and Indigenous American ancestry). In the Mexican literary tradition, opinions differ concerning the character of Malinche; some consider her a traitor, while others

consider her a symbolic national mother to the new Mexican people. In the period following the Mexican Revolution, the image of Malinche as a respected counterpart to Cortés was transformed, and she was depicted as an evil, scheming temptress by those who promoted an Indigenous national identity. However, Chicana feminist movements have more recently reevaluated La Malinche and sought to cast her as the victim of colonial and patriarchal domination. In their anthology, Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero argue that Chicanas should reexamine the archetype of La Malinche, focusing specifically on four main points: La Malinche was a victim of her family and her historical circumstances; she was exiled from her own community, then captured, raped, and subjugated by Cortés; she was the mother of a new race, mestizaje; she was a translator and discourse transmitter in whom many Chicana writers have found inspiration for their own lingual and cultural shape-shifting; and finally, she was a survivor who made choices and did not merely remain a passive victim (193). Rebolledo and Rivero deconstruct the hegemonic representation of this female figure and rehabilitate her in a positive way that corresponds to the Chicana feminist endeavor for Chicana women's empowerment. Both Arab and Chicana women writers have set out to decolonize the stereotypical image of Shahrazad and Malinche respectively as submissive or sexual temptresses, casting them and their lineages instead as clever survivors with their own subjectivities.

3. Zarqa al-Yamama and the Curandera:

Another female archetype employed by Arab women writers is Zarqa al-Yamama, a semi-legendary pagan Arab woman whose tribesmen ignored her clairvoyance to their own detriment. She was a blue-eyed Najdi woman from a town in central Arabia with good eyesight that allowed her to see great distances. This gave her the ability to save her tribe many times from approaching attackers. Knowing Zarqa's penetrating eyesight, an attacking tribe hid behind

trees that they carried as camouflage to prevent Zarqa from warning her people. She notified her tribe that trees were advancing, but they did not pay attention to her warnings, thinking that she was raving (Khoury 312-3). Consequently, her tribe was massacred, and Zarqa's eyes were plucked out by the enemy soldiers. She was then crucified. Zarqa's tribe was annihilated because they neglected Zarqa's keen insight and intuition. Zarqa's story underscores the acuity of women's intuition and senses and their ability to predict danger before it happens. This story has been part of the Arabic folklore canon for centuries. The legacy of Zarqa has been acknowledged and employed by some Arab writers, such as the Palestinian poet Izz al-Dīn al-Manāsra, whose 1966 poem "Zarqa al-Yamama" uses the figure of Zarqa to tell of the danger of the Zionist occupation and the looming defeat of the Palestinian Arabs in 1967. The poet employs the symbolism and structure of the legendary story and connects the past to the present to criticize the state of the Arab countries and the ineffectiveness of the Arab leaders (Musa 210). Following this, the Egyptian poet Amal Dunqul wrote a poem entitled "Al- Buka'a bayn yadi Zarqa al-Yamama" ("Crying in the Arms of Zarqa al-Yamama") in 1969. In this poem, he addresses Zarqa in the voice of a defeated soldier who channels Arabs' feelings regarding the aftermath of the 1967 war between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. He uses the figure of Zarqa to affirm his adherence to his Arab identity and the great losses that Arabs suffered in the Naksa because of the Arab leaders' disregard for the effects of this war on their people. These poets revive the legacy of Zarqa in order to articulate their fears, foresight, and concerns about national issues and the consequences of ignoring imminent threats from colonial powers. In the short story by Salwa Bakr "International Women's Day," we find an allusion to the legacy of Zarqa as a symbol of cautionary truth and power (Cohen-Mor 194). In a scathing, ironical style, Salwa Bakr critiques the marginalization of women in Egyptian society and the dominant patriarchal apparatus, itself a

replica of the colonial power structure that restricts the role of Arab women to the domestic and private sphere. The authoritative male teacher, who is supposed to celebrate the significant role of women in society on International Women's Day and teach his pupils to value and appreciate women, seems unable to observe his own teachings. His ignorance of Zarqa al-Yamama in the celebratory speech symbolizes public neglect of women's visions and roles in the ongoing struggle toward progress and equality.

The Zarqa archetype can be seen to be parallel to the archetype of the *curandera* in Chicana culture. Just as Zarqa uses her clairvoyance to warn her community and protect them from dangers, the *curandera*, with her healing powers, serves her community as a healer and protector. The *curandera* is a woman who has healing powers that she incorporates to heal people physically and spiritually through performing traditional folk healing rituals and using remedies that are derived from natural elements, such as herbs. Amanda Ellis defines *curanderas* as “practitioners of traditional plant-based folk healing practices that regard personhood as mindbodyspirit— the unity of mind, body, and spirit— and aim to safeguard and preserve individual and collective well-being” (4). *Curanderas* are marginalized and misrepresented in patriarchal and colonial systems of representation. In colonial and patriarchal discourse, the *curandera/os* are associated with evil spirits and are depicted as witches. This representation is defied by Chicana writers, such as Ana Castillo and Rudolfo Anaya, who depict the *curandera* as a representation of a dynamic figure and the source of effective healing knowledge. These Chicana writers revive the *curandera* figure to present an oppositional consciousness that promotes traditional healing practices as more effective healing strategies than mainstream medicine constructions. *Curanderas'* legacy constitutes a significant tool used by Chicana writers as a metaphor for healing the ailments of colonialism and U.S. imperialist ideologies,

such as assimilation and identity erasure and their devastating effects on Chicana communities. Ellis states that the project of reviving the *curandera*'s legacy is to "discursively produce knowledge linking coloniality to the creation of illness and trauma and reveal the ways in which people construct broader theoretical, activist, and fictional discourses centered on healing the lived impact of colonized experience" (11). *Curanderas* are knowledgeable Chicanas who use their knowledge to heal their communities and produce new knowledge that challenge the imperialist healthcare practices and exploitative ideologies and work toward a holistic healing practice, reflecting an oppositional positionality and a counterhegemonic legacy.

The Purpose of the Study and Historical Background:

The main reason behind building my project around Iraqi and Chicana women fiction is to provide a counterargument or counternarrative to Eurocentric and American majoritarian history and imperialist ideologies which are built on hierarchical paradigms. During Donald Trump's administration, racist and othering discourses surfaced more aggressively, such as anti-immigration, anti-Mexican, Islamophobic, and masculinist discourses. His white supremacist ideological discourses targeted Muslims, Mexican/Latin immigrants, women, LGPTQ communities, and others. He described immigrants from Mexico and central America as criminals and rapists and intensified the post 9/11 misconception of labeling Muslims and Arab immigrants as terrorists. His political stand reflects decades of hegemonic white supremacist ideologies and the American imperialism that is built on misrepresentation and reduction through marking the "Other" as a threat to legitimize its exertion of power and its imperialist schemes. Iraqi women and Chicanas are among the many entities affected by U.S. hegemonic ideologies and imperialism. In my research I attempt to investigate the effect of the imperialist project on Chicanas and Iraqi women in the selected novels/short stories. How do the female characters

resist and survive? What approach do the writers use to produce their counternarrative? I use Edward Said's concept of contrapuntal reading to frame my analysis of these works.

Contrapuntal reading is an analytical approach developed by Said in his book, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), to interpret colonial and postcolonial texts and provide a counternarrative to the dominant/imperialist knowledge: "Without significant exception the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-Europe world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion; there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgement that the colonized people should be heard from, their ideas known" (50). Said offers to read the literature of the colonized alongside the literature of the colonizer to voice the marginalized story of the colonized. It provides a critique of the imperialist culture and highlights peripheral histories/stories, so "alternative or new narratives emerge, and they become institutionalized or discursively stable entities" (51). I chose Iraqi and Chicana literature to shed light on the alternative narrative Iraqi and Chicana women writers present as a counternarrative to the hegemonic discourses imposed by American and European imperialism that maintains its existence through silencing local narratives of resistance and survival. The selected novels and short stories question the imperialist ideologies and policies and build up new narratives of survival in the face of systemic marginalization, loss, and erasure. This project participates in the existing scholarship of anti-imperialist and postcolonial feminist discourses through contrapuntal analysis that focuses on the agencies of local women participating in decolonizing fixed hegemonic ideologies about gender and Chicana and Iraqi women's subjectivities. It provides a critique of these imperialist ideologies from below.

Iraqi women and Chicanas, despite many differences, share a somewhat similar status in their relationship to dominant U.S. hierarchical racial and economic structures. Iraq and the American Southwest have been part of the American political scheme to build the U.S. empire which economically and politically controlled these regions and other areas in the world to protect its capitalist system and enforce its imperialist agendas. The U.S. invasion of Iraq is one of the recent phases of building the American empire that started its first expansionist schemes with the Mexican-American war in the late nineteenth century. This war resulted in the annexation of what is now called the American Southwest. Chicana/o struggle due to U.S. hegemony goes back to 1820s when groups of English-speakers started settling in the part of Mexico known today as Texas. The Anglo-American colonial expansions (the U.S. -Mexican War 1846-1848) ended with annexing other lands of Mexico and more U.S. colonial activities in the Southwest. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo enabled the Mexicans living in the ceded lands to remain in their lands. However, Mexicans were not socially welcomed by Anglo-American settlers, and they were treated as second-class citizens on their lands (Griswold del Castillo 37). They were not allowed to have significant political roles, and they suffered from decades of political and economic discrimination. The general perception of Mexican Americans in Anglo-American dominant discourses was that they were unskilled and ignorant, so they were not given equal opportunities as white Americans, and they were living in a cycle of poverty and illiteracy, and their “labor became synonymous with unskilled, cheap manual labor” (Gonzalez 9). At school, Mexican American students were segregated and prohibited from speaking Spanish and embracing their original culture “to ‘Americanize’ in a controlled linguistic and cultural environment” (Gonzalez 13). Moreover, they were not given access to adequate education, so they remain in the cycle of low-paid jobs (13). Mexican children were taught to

negatively perceive their culture, language, families, and community, and they were forced to assimilate (Munoz 32). Assimilation does not mean that Mexican Americans would be accepted as equal residents and citizens. They were manipulated as labor workers with low wages (32). For decades, these Mexican Americans were subjected to various forms of violence, harassment, lynching, and racial discrimination. The Anglo-American politicians, lawyers, and speculators used exclusionary policies that encouraged discriminating Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants and forcing them to live in unpleasant economic, social, and environmental conditions to force them leave the land. Unsatisfied with the marginalization and discrimination they were submitted to, Mexican Americans found that they need to change their marginalized status quo. The roots of the Chicano civil rights movement go back to September, 1965, when Mexican American farmworkers in California grape fields went on a strike, demanding an increase in wages and to live a decent life and better work conditions. The growers used all forms of violence to stop the strikes, from jabbing elbows into the picketers' ribs, to gun shooting them, to driving machines at a high speed towards the protestors to intimidate them, to spraying them with sulfur (Kallen 67-8). The strikes escalated and turned into a movement. Thousands of Mexican Americans participated in walkouts and marches and non-violent activities to force landowners and grape growers achieve the demands of the protesters. In 1967, The farmworkers' union decided to boycott the whole industry of grape growing to get the growers to negotiate the workers' demands. In 1968, the leader and founder of the movement, Cesar Chavez, who strongly believed in nonviolent resistance, went on twenty-five days of fasting, an act which helped turning a lot of the movement's enemies to support the protestors and the cause of the movement. The protestors got the support of the American public, and, in 1970, they succeeded to make the growers accept their demands after five years of struggle.

The farmworkers' strikes were a pivotal inspirational motive for young Chicano students and activists to depart from "the politics of accommodation and assimilation" (Munoz 35) and to fight the discrimination they had to face in American schools and institutions. Chicano youth were not satisfied with the segregated treatment they received at schools and the inadequate education they were receiving. They became angry with the stereotypical ways they were perceived with that turned them into commodities of labor. Mexican children were taught to negatively perceive their culture, language, families, and community, and they were forced to assimilate. In response to the oppression and discrimination they were receiving, Chicano students called for a walkout to demand improvements in the education system, such as bilingual teaching, including Mexican American history courses, ending corporal punishment, and employing more Mexican American teachers and counselors. Thousands of students participated in the walkouts which occurred in Denver and East L.A. in the 1968. The students' walkouts did not gain the support of the majority community, and they were met with brutality by the police and FBI that abused and jailed them. Thirteen students' leaders were arrested and accused of conspiracy and subversiveness (Munoz 38). However, those walkouts were the first seeds of a long history of fighting U.S. institutional oppression of the Chicana/os, and they played a significant role in voicing Chicana/os demands for economic and political reformations.

Chicanos wanted political representation to change their social and economic status. They were denied the right to vote, and they were forced by their landowners to vote for certain white candidates. In 1963, Mexican Americans challenged the Anglo-American authorities and presented their own candidates to be elected as the new officials in South Texas. Later, La Raza Unida or the United People Party was created in 1970 to embrace Chicano nationalism and to

gain political power. Women were the biggest population that supported the party. Art was also another powerful element that supporters of La Raza used to instill Chicano ethno-nationalism.

Chicanas have suffered from intersectional discrimination in the U.S.; they have been marginalized in terms of gender, ethnicity, and class. Chicanas have been marginalized and misrepresented on their own land. Chicanas have suffered from marginalization from both the dominant U.S. imperialist ideologies and Chicano patriarchal domination. They had to confront the systemic erosion of their Mexican heritage and the loss of their land by the Anglo-American dominant and imperialist policies which othered them and confined them within the boundaries of the inferior and incompetent. At the same time, they had to change the Chicano patriarchal ideologies that confined them with traditional roles of the good woman and the silent housewife who should prioritize her family on her own needs and rights. Gender inequality was not proposed as one of the main issues for Chicano anti-imperialist activism and “many perceived feminism as a white-women issue and believed strongly that Chicanas should follow the Chicano leadership of the movement” (Munoz 42). The Chicano ethno-national movement embraced the concept of the traditional Chicano family as an ideal way to fight against “Americanness”, and with this perception came the enforcement of a dichotomous understanding of women’s roles as those who deviated from the Chicano family norms and rejected the restricted gender roles were considered as “bad” women and were accused of betraying their people and traditions. Values of women’s freedom and empowerment have been contested by Chicano patriarchal and ethno-national project because Chicano leaders have thought these values are adopted from the American ideologies. The U.S. sociopolitical and socioeconomic systems do not acknowledge the needs of minor ethnicities. For Chicanas, the hierarchical systems affected their lives and sought to confine them within essentialized and inferior roles. Rolando Romero and Amanda

Nolacea Harris state that “the movement assigned limited roles to women; the Chicana as faithful follower, sexual partner or nurturing mother figure to the Chicano revolutionary” (x). This confinement impedes Chicanas from improving their social and economic status quo. Many are not offered adequate education that addresses their needs and stereotyped as failures and different, the fact that constrains them from achieving independence and socioeconomic mobility and makes them live in poverty and hard conditions in enclave neighborhoods. Chicanas have to fight on different scales to achieve self-empowerment and self-development. Their participation in the Chicano civil rights movement was immense from the start but unacknowledged. Nannetta Regua states that Chicana women played different roles as organizers, leaders, and founders of several anti-imperialist organizations and grassroots activism that spoke against U.S. imperialism and the erasure of Mexican American cultural heritage and institutional discrimination, and they were vital supporters of the movement and its cause: “they were college students, working women, single women, wives, mothers, grandmothers, and community advocates. Several Chicanas juggled familial and movement responsibilities” (115). They participated in initiating campaigns against segregated and stereotyped treatment of Chicana children at U.S. schools (116). They supported the United Farm Workers’ strikes and boycott of grapes sold out by growers who refused to cooperate with the farm workers (124). They opposed the U.S. war in Vietnam and criticized U.S. imperialist ideologies (127). They faced violence and oppression from the U.S. police as what happened in 1969 when the Fiestas de la Rosas Parade (a cultural event in San Jose) turned into violent confrontation between the police forces and the protesters. Chicanas were purposely targeted and brutally beaten to provoke Chicanos and agitate more violence (123). Chicanas’ participation in Chicanos’ anti-imperialists protests was an important move towards changing Chicanas’ institutionalized roles. They were threatened and maltreated

from their male relatives and from the U.S. police forces because Chicanas' independence and empowerment meant diminishing patriarchal and hegemonic ideologies. Chicanas' demands for gender equality and representation in the Chicano Movement was sometimes contested by the men in the movement, who treated Chicana activists in a sexist and condescending way, accusing them of betraying the movement. Romero and Harris state that "sexual independence... bringing feminist concerns to the table, public leadership, and refusal to have (Chicano) children, earned Chicanas epithets that imply the mutual exclusivity of Chicano activism and feminism—"agrigada," "Malinchista," and "vendida"—under the assumption that feminism is a negative foreign influence as opposed to an authentic concern within Chicana/o communities" (xi).

Decades after the movement, Chicana women still fight for gender equality. They still suffer from racialized and stereotypical discrimination. Their economic status quo does not seem to improve due to payment disparity. They are subjected to hate crimes and forced to assimilate because their celebration of their Mexican heritage threatens the Anglo-American exclusive concept of citizenship and nationalism. Anti-immigration policies have affected people of Mexican origin in the U.S. because they sour U.S. attitude toward Mexican and Mexican Americans. They are perceived as criminals and threats, and they have to constantly fend these stereotypes and show that they are integrated in the American society and culture. Jessica M. Vasquez states that Mexican Americans are racialized as a result of the mainstream society's lack of understanding of the differences between Mexican immigrants and Mexicans born in the U.S.: "natives assume that people of Mexican descent are foreign and unauthorized. This often-erroneous assumption provokes nativist fears of the "browning" or "Latin Americanization" of the United States and engraves inter-ethnic boundaries, often drawn and guarded via discrimination" (52). Mexican American women and their families are too often considered

foreigners who should renounce the Mexican side of their culture, and their rights on their land. Mexican American women, according to Vasquez, are “excluded, experiencing withdrawal of access to resources, support, or jobs” (53) when their Mexican heritage is discovered. They are “othered” through racialized and exoticized forms of discrimination (57). Due to a long history of discrimination and racism, Chicanas were subjugated to systemic erasure of identity, land, language, and culture. They still have limited political power and representation.

The American imperialist interest in Iraq and the Middle East goes back to the British colonization of Iraq in 1915 to secure new oil fields. The British General, Stanley Maude, proclaimed that his army came to Iraq as liberators not as conquerors, a claim which A. G. Hopkins finds similar to the justifications given by the American government to invade Iraq in 2003 (4). The U.S. has a long history of violent and systematic interference in the political affairs of the Middle East to control oil resources and keep the region under control starting in the 1930s when U.S. interest in the Middle East increased as the Americans established their first oil companies in Saudi Arabia. In the 1950s-1960s, the U.S. government became an ally to the British to prevent the Soviet Union from controlling the region, and it started supporting the newly founded state of Israel in Palestine.

British colonization of the Mesopotamian region (modern day Iraq) in the nineteenth century laid the foundation for the imperialist practices of the U.S. in the country in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The British found in Iraq the perfect target geographically and economically: its geographical importance for the British trade route and its importance as a source of oil. They established the first seeds of capitalism in Iraq by changing the communal land system of the Arab tribes in Iraq into a private property system. The British took the continual military intervention as the practical method to achieve their colonialist

schemes in Iraq. This imperialist discourse of militarization to “liberate” and “protect” echoes the later U.S. discourse to invade Iraq when the U.S. invaded Iraq to liberate its people from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. U.S. intervention in the Iraqi affairs became overt after Abd al-Karim Qassim overthrew the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 to establish the Iraqi Republic. His communist and nationalist policies did not appeal to the U.S. as they meant losing control over oil companies, so the U.S. funded the Ba‘ath party and its eventual leader Saddam Hussein with money and weapons to overthrow Qassim, as Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt states quoting the statement of the second secretary of the American embassy in Baghdad in the early sixties, James Akins, in a 2004 interview (117). However, Hussein and his party adopted an anti-foreign corporate interest and anti-U.S. stances, which also did not satisfy the U.S. government and marked Iraq as a problem.

The U.S. government normalized the frequent military attacks against Iraq as part of the narrative of “war on terror” campaign, and by 2001 began to categorize the Iraqi government led by Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis as a threat, connecting them to the 9/11 events. In 1991, the U.S. lead a collision of more than thirty countries and led the military attacks in the Gulf War as a reaction to Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait. The war resulted in destroying Iraq’s economy and killing thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians and destroying almost the entire infrastructure of the country. Iraqis had to undergo thirteen years of sanctions and unbearable economic conditions. The war and the embargo restricted women’s public roles and produced state pressure on them to be confined within the boundaries of the traditional roles of mothers and housewives because of the general sense of insecurity, the deterioration of social conditions, the collapse of funded governmental supportive systems, such as childcare and nurseries, and the low wages they received from formal work. Nadjé AL- Ali states that “unlike the modernist image of the ‘good

Iraqi woman' working side by side with men that was prevalent in the 1970s and up to the mid-1980s, the ideal and idealized woman became the housewife and mother, who should stay away from degrading work and mixing with the opposite sex" (189). The U.S. imperialist interventions in the Iraqi economic and political sides enormously affected Iraqi women's participation in public domains and limited their roles in society. Then, in 2003, the U.S. government led the most destructive war in modern history and invaded Iraq under the pretext of ending dictatorship and destroying weapons of mass destruction, a reason which proved to be false. The invasion had catastrophic effects on Iraqi civilians and resulted in the death of millions of Iraqis and fueling sectarian violence. Iraq descended into chaos as a result of disbanding the Iraqi Army and the outbreak of religious militia groups. Iraq became an open ground for settling opposing ideological and political conflicts. Destruction reached every sector of the country: agriculture, industry, education, history, and culture. As a result of the prevailing chaos and the catastrophic effects of war, thousands of Iraqis were displaced and forced to leave their homes and be dispersed throughout the world to escape persecution, war, and destruction.

One of the misconceptions and pretexts that the U.S. administration manipulated to justify the invasion was liberating Iraqi women from gendered oppression. Instead of liberating and empowering Iraqi women, the invasion increased women's marginalization and oppression. Lawlessness and escalating violence and criminality deteriorated Iraqi women's status quo. Iraqi women were among the high rates of fatalities caused by U.S. military violence and militias and terrorists attacks. The U.S. invasion produced new notions of gender relations and women roles as the spread of insecurity and Islamist and militia groups imposed rigid gender ideologies that targeted women's dress and behavior and limited their mobility and freedom: "women are symbolic markers of the break from the nominally secular Saddam Hussein regime and a means

of differentiating Iraqi society from the “foreign culture” of the United States and its allies” (Al-Ali 80). Instead of helping Iraqi women play a vital role in reconstructing the “new Iraq” and be more active in public spaces, the U.S. invasion enforced hierarchical gender ideologies that suppressed Iraqi women. The post-Saddam Hussein political system, which is based on sectarianism and *muhāsasa* system (quota-based political system) reconstructed and enforced patriarchal domination by conservative political groups and militias. The new conservative and rigid gender ideologies masculinized the political and social scene, confining women within the boundaries of the domestic roles.

Eighteen years after the invasion, the status quo of Iraqi women deteriorated immensely as a result of the sectarian war, displacement, economic hardships, escalating violence. In 2014, the extremist militia that grew as a result of the 2003 U.S. invasion called the Islamic State swept across Iraq; they oppressed women and represented the extreme form of violence, marginalization, and discrimination against Iraqi women, targeting all women who opposed their terrorist ideologies. Under the Islamic State’s gendered ideologies, Iraqi women were abducted, abused, displaced, widowed, tortured, and killed. They suppressed women from minority ethnicities, such as the Yazidi women, and practiced sexual abduction and genocide against them and their families to assert their power. The sectarian political system imposed by the U.S. created unending problems and resulted in an uneven distribution of resources and the economic capital and government corruption, resulting in high rates of unemployment, poverty, and numerous human crises. U.S. foreign policy and its intervention in Iraqis’ political and economic affairs turned the country into an open area for neighboring countries and terrorist ideologies to destroy its economy, social construction and culture. Fed up with the successive governments’ promises of reformation and ending corruption, thousands of Iraqis—mainly Iraqi youth— took the

streets and engaged in massive protests that launched the Tishrīn Revolution in October 2019 in Baghdad and the southern provinces. The main demand of these unarmed protesters was changing the corrupted political system and enhancing the living conditions of the Iraqis. They were chanting “nūrīd watan” which means we want a homeland, which they felt they lost because of the erosion of Iraq’s economic autonomy and political sovereignty. Despite the brutality of the Iraqi security forces and their attendant militias, targeting the protesters with live bullets and tear gas canisters, women’s participation in the revolution was very noticeable and active. Women’s participation in this protest movement broke down decades of silencing and oppression and changed institutionalized social norms of gender segregation and women marginalization. These women challenged patriarchal and imperial ideologies that confined them within domestic spaces and succeeded in taking back the public space by demonstrating and loudly voicing their demands. The presence of Iraqi women from different backgrounds and ages in the demonstration was vital and diverse. There were many young women fighting along with their young male protesters in the lines of confrontations with security forces. Others were paramedics taking care of wounded protestors, or artists raising awareness of the protestors’ demands and sufferings. There were women cooking and cleaning. Other women financially supported the demonstrations. Their participation played a key role in breaking down hierarchical social norms and masculine authorities that excluded women from public spaces, silenced them, and considered them as a social stigma.

Due to the long history of imperialist and colonialist domination, Iraqi and Chicana women have been marginalized and misrepresented. Chicanas have been excluded from U.S. political and economic discourses, and they have suffered from a long history of racial discrimination, social stigmatization, and identity erasure. Similarly, the U.S. imperialist policies

have affected the social, economic and political status quo of Iraqi women. Moreover, in both cases, women have been manipulated by neocolonial and patriarchal systems as a means to fight Anglo-American ideologies. Consequently, Iraqi and Chicana women have undergone gendered discrimination and their identities have been defined within the boundaries of the domestic and the private spaces. My research provides a counterargument of the ideological disempowerment and misrepresentation of Iraqi and Chicana women and highlights the anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist subjectivities and consciousnesses adopted by women in the selected texts to show resistance and survival.

Methodology:

This study will apply postcolonial and feminist postcolonial theories. Together, these lenses constitute two central strategies for building an oppositional consciousness that defies colonial and mainstream colonial discourses. Feminist postcolonial frameworks produce an alternative discourse to the one-sided hegemonic ideologies that situate gender as the singular form of oppression that all women face while neglecting intersectional and multifaceted discourses of subordination. I will use these two paradigms to provide a multifaceted analysis of the texts I have chosen for this project. I use Edward Said's concept of counternarrative or contrapuntal analysis, which he coins in his book, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). He provides an alternative perception of literary critique that sheds the light on the marginalized and the silenced experiences of the colonized people and cultures as a response to imperialist discourses. I also use Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concept of oppositional subjectivity which she theorizes in the introductory chapter of the book, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991), as a way of understanding marginalized women's day-to-day experiences to provide knowledge from oppositional locations and spaces. In addition, I will use the works of a number

of Chicana feminist theorists, such as Gloria Anzaldua and Chela Sandoval, among others, and I will also use the works of a number of Arab feminist theorists, such as Hanadi al-Samman, Mona Fayad, Ferial J. Ghazoul, and Fedwa Multi-Douglas, among others. Using these theoretical frameworks, I consider the ways in which the selected narrative fictions produce counterarguments that decolonize the distorted representations of Iraqi and Chicana women's subjectivities. In tracing the reincarnation and reimagining of the legacy of Khansa, Zarqa al-Yamama, Shahrazad, La Llorona, La Malinche, and *the curandera* in these works, I show how Iraqi and Chicana women narratives provide anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal consciousness and counternarratives that proffer a critique of gendered ideologies and imperialist policies.

Chapter Overview:

This study will be divided into three chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. The first chapter, or the introduction of this study, provides an overview of the fictional and historical female figures and the archetypal configurations with which they are associated. The focus is on introducing their stories and legacies and the gendered perceptions of their identities/subjectivities. I will also provide a brief survey of how these female figures have been depicted in Eurocentric and hegemonic discourses and how they have been depicted in Arab and Chicana literature before and since the colonial era. This survey is necessary and useful to understand how Arab and Chicana women writers reengage with these iconic female figures and how they reincarnate them in innovative ways in their work. The introduction also gives a brief historical background of the Iraqis' and Chicana's struggle from American colonial and imperialist ideologies to show the comparable aspects of these two different areas of research.

The second chapter, "Loss and Melancholia in Iraqi and Chicana Fiction," presents a counter perception of the archetype of the melancholic/ wailing woman. Through analyzing

Ina'am Kachachi's novel *Tashari* (2013) and Ana Castillo's novel *So Far from God* (1993), I argue that the melancholic affect generated from loss has a productive effect on the main female protagonists who enact Khansa and La Llorona subjectivities. These women disrupt the Freudian definition of unproductive pathological melancholia and find healing strategies to their traumas and losses. The diasporic/borderland melancholia regenerates new subjectivities that voice invisible losses and determines how women express agency within loss: loss of children/family and loss of homeland.

The third chapter, "Shahrazad and La Malinche: Transforming the Archetype," analyzes the distorted perception of the legacies of Shahrazad and La Malinche that define them in terms of sexual beings or passive beings. The Iraqi writer, Lutfiyya al-Dulaimi, and the Chicana writer, Sandra Cisneros, question the fixed gendered representation of these two figures in their short stories, "Shahrazad and Her Narrators" (1999) and "Never Marry a Mexican" (1991), respectively. These authors present a counternarrative to the dominant ideologies and disrupt the gendered representation of these two figures.

The fourth chapter, "Intuition, Healing, and Postcolonial Subjectivities," examines the legacies of Zarqa al-Yamama and the *curandera* as two examples of the significance of women's knowledge—intuition and herbal and spiritual healing—in national and ethnonational discourses and resistance. In this chapter, analyzing Maysalun Hadi's *Al- 'yūn al-Sūd* (*the Black Eyes* 2002) and Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* (1993), I will follow Iraqi and Chicana women's struggle to develop their own postcolonial feminist consciousness that enacts challenging feminist subjectivities and avoids the reductionist representation of women as mere symbols of the protective Mother of the nation (Iraq) or the ethnicity (Chicanx).

In chapter five, I conclude that in response to dominant ideologies, Iraqi and Chicana women writers have provided a subversive literature that articulates new consciousnesses/subjectivities while deconstructing stereotypical, essentialist, and Othering images. The employment of historical and legendary female figures by these writers serves their central goal of celebrating their own rich cultural and historical heritage, reclaiming their Indigenous identities, and elevating their feminist and national subjectivities in defiance of colonial/ imperialist and patriarchal hegemonic discourses. There is a popular saying among Iraqis: in every Iraqi house, there is a Khansa, meaning that in every Iraqi house, there is a woman mourning the martyrdom of her son, brother, or father due to the military struggles and wars that the country has witnessed since the nineteen eighties to the present. The echo of the voice of Khansa and the other foremothers/figures surveyed above, each in her respective culture, can be heard loudly and clearly rejecting the erasure of their Indigenous and national identities and challenging the dominant ideologies and powers, marshaling their voices to mourn their lost loved ones, identities, and institutions, alert their countrymen and women to danger, and ultimately to survive.

Chapter Two

Loss and Melancholia in Iraqi and Chicana Fiction

The experience of colonialism/imperialism for Iraqi and Chicana women is defined by loss: loss of culture, loss of land/country, loss of identity, loss of dear ones. The melancholia of loss is a principal trope tackled in Iraqi and Chicana women's writings. These Iraqi and Chicana women writers confront colonial hegemony with oppositional intellectual and ideological consciousnesses that embrace historical and cultural heritage and restore what colonialism has taken: home/land in its broader meaning of familial, cultural, (ethno-) national belonging. In this chapter, I investigate the melancholic effect of loss (diasporic and borderland) in Iraqi and Chicana women's novels and how these texts provide a counternarrative that highlights the productivity and resilience of Chicana and Iraqi women through the revival of the legacies of two female icons in Arab and Chicana culture: Khansa and La Llorona. The primary texts I am using are *Tashari (Dispersed 2013)* by Ina'am Kachachi and *So Far from God (1993)* by Ana Castillo. I argue that the melancholic affect generated from loss has a productive effect on the main female protagonists who enact Khansa and La Llorona subjectivities. These women disrupt the Freudian definition of unproductive pathological melancholia and find healing strategies to their traumas and losses. The diasporic/borderland melancholia regenerates new subjectivities that voice invisible losses and determines how women express agency within loss: loss of children/family and loss of homeland.

Freud considers melancholia as a pathological affect that cannot be cured because the melancholic subject refuses to leave her loss. In his article "Mourning and Melancholia," he defines mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (243).

Mourning, for him, is not pathological or harmful. On the other hand, melancholia is a painful psychological ailment affecting the ego, turning the melancholic subject into a passive unproductive subject: “The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale” (246). Freud shows the difference between mourning and melancholia and defines melancholia as a limiting and disempowering pathological disease affecting the ego of the melancholic person and directing the feelings of hatred and anger towards the self: “In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable” (246). Unlike mourning, melancholia prevents the melancholic from leading a progressive life; it entraps her in a circle of pathological delusions and continues without abatement because she does not sever her attachment to the lost object which is recessed in her unconscious. In a case of melancholia, the lost object is incorporated with the ego of the melancholic subject; this incorporation prevents the subject from separating from the lost object and keeps her in a perpetual state of repudiating herself. For Freud, melancholy is more painful than mourning because it is rooted in the loss of self-esteem and in a constant state of self-loathing and self-reproach. It is more destructive than productive. As for women, Freud’s analysis of their melancholia and expression of loss is gender and class biased: “A good, capable, conscientious woman will speak no better of herself after she develops melancholia than one who is in fact worthless; indeed, the former is perhaps more likely to fall ill of the disease than the latter, of whom we too should have nothing good to say” (247). This gendered and class-prejudiced representation of melancholia and the politics of mourning leaves women without agency and renders them as passive objects who lack the ability to voice their loss. From a feminist point of

view, melancholia is a cultural privilege for men, but not for women.¹ Juliana Schiesari asserts that “women have not had the same cultural tradition, one that would enable them to express feelings of disempowerment and loss in a “non-alienated” way. The melancholic of the past was a “great man”; the stereotypical depressive of today is a woman” (95). In this chapter, I question this gendered understanding of women’s melancholia and investigate how Iraqi and Chicana women, in the selected novels, react to loss and voice their pain in a productive way.

Freud’s views about the destructiveness of melancholia have been criticized by theorists of different disciplines. These theorists find in Freud’s “mourning” disloyalty to the lost object. Slavoj Žižek contends,

against Freud, one should assert the conceptual and ethical primacy of melancholy. In the process of the loss, there is always a remainder that cannot be integrated through the work of mourning, and the ultimate fidelity is the fidelity to this remainder. Mourning is a kind of betrayal, the second killing of the (lost) object, while the melancholic subject remains faithful to the lost object, refusing to renounce his or her attachment to it. (658)

In this paragraph, Žižek finds in melancholia a way of maintaining faithfulness to the lost object. He offers postcolonial melancholia as an example in which Freud’s mourning can be interpreted as betrayal of one’s ethnic/Indigenous roots and traditions. Freud himself, moreover, blurred the binary separation of mourning/melancholia in his article, “The Ego and the Id” (1923) in which he redefined the connection between the two paradigms, identifying melancholia as an integral part of the process of mourning and as a way to continue the energy of mourning over the lost object.

In postcolonial discourses produced by the colonized or formerly colonized, retaining Indigenous cultures, roots, traditions, language, identity, and history are central topics. The

¹ See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

melancholic affect that the postcolonial subject develops as a reaction to the multiple losses she/he encounters can be a healthy healing strategy that creates new perspectives of her postcolonial experience. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian emphasize the creative role of melancholia in creating new attitudes about the lost object: “While mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest, melancholia’s continued and open relation to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects” (4). Sustained melancholic grief keeps the connection/attachment between the melancholic and the lost object, which in turn creates a new anti-colonial consciousness and subjectivity whose melancholy is re-engaging and productive.

In Arab and Chicana cultures, the figures of Khansa and La Llorona stand as two prominent female figures whose stories revolve around loss and melancholia and whose legacy is perpetuated by Arab and Chicana women writers. There is an obvious difference between the two figures as Khansa is mostly remembered as a sister, while La Llorona is remembered as a mother. La Llorona’s association with the idea of motherhood makes her a target for patriarchal ideological misrepresentations as she is labeled the “bad mother” who abandons her children and deviates from “normal” and acceptable motherhood. Khansa’s association with sisterhood, on the other hand, does not constitute as direct a threat to patriarchy as La Llorona’s motherhood. Khansa is also criticized by some Arab feminists for her celebration of martial masculinist values and promoting tribal war/vengeance. What makes the two figures comparable is the idea of loss: Khansa loses her brothers, and La Llorona loses her children. Through revitalizing the legacy of these two figures, the selected narratives, *Tashari* and *So Far from God*, create new consciousness and new conversations about Chicana and Iraqi women’s identities, culture, and subjectivities. The legacies of Khansa and La Llorona provide examples of resilience and power

which transform fixed gender binaries and assumptions of mourning and melancholia into new and more productive narratives.

In Iraqi/Arab history and culture, Khansa stands as a prominent female figure with her unique elegiac poetry in which she laments the loss of her brothers. Her elegiac poetry is not merely an expression of melancholy provoked by the loss of her two brothers but rather serves as a document that historicizes the bravery and generosity of her brothers. She has been critiqued for celebrating dead men and promoting violence and vengeance in her elegies. Moreover, critics of Arabic poetry have historically limited their understanding of her poems emphasizing the view that “men express; women emote” (Hammond 144). Her poetic production was reduced to gendered mourning, and it was limited to elegies because it is the suitable poetic genre for women’s emotionality and their “feminine sentimentality” (144). Quoting Alan Jones’s description of Khansa, Eric Ormsby seems to assert the idea of gendered hysterical inclinations: “her obsession with lament was all engulfing—unhinged does not seem too strong a description of her personality” (26). Hammond suggests a new approach of reading Arab women’s elegies to avoid the exaggeration of essentialist and gendered understandings of this poetic genre, proposing instead that “women composed not what they could, but rather what they would” (144), giving women agency in choosing elegies as a genre of their poetic production. DeYoung also critiques the notion of the elegy as a “literary ghetto” to which women writers were condemned, referencing the many famous male Arabic poets, such as Mutammim Ibn Nuwayra, who frequently composed elegies (49). Elegies, as evidenced by DeYoung, were not limited to women, and women did not necessarily produce elegies because they were marginalized and silenced (50). DeYoung understands literature as a social institution that promotes certain genres

that do not constitute a threat to the social fabric, and the elegy was a form more closely aligned with social standards of personality and conduct attributed to women (50).

Twentieth-century Arab literary critic Bint al-Shati describes Khansa's personality as independent, daring, and strong, and she stands out as a prominent female poet in an environment characterized by its masculinity. Her refusal of a marriage proposal by one of the most famous Arab chiefs and knights, Durayd b. al-Simma, known for his unbeatable chivalry and courage, reflects her strong independent personality: "With this refusal, Khansa decides the destiny of her tribe with her decision, for who dares to propose to marry from Khansa's tribe after what the lord of Bani Djusham faced" (31). This anecdote, among others, demonstrates the active agency of Khansa and deconstructs the distorted representations of Arab women in hegemonic discourses. Her melancholic grief over the loss of her brothers, especially Sakhr, who used to help and support her at times of need, provides the Arab literary heritage with a rich source of elegiac poetry. In crafting elegies and reflecting her melancholic grief, her excellence was acknowledged by eloquent Arab poets, such as al-Nabigha and al-Ma'arri. Bint al-Shati refers to the widely acclaimed conversation between al-Nabigha and Khansa when he praises her poetic skill as "the greatest among those with breasts." To which she replies, "and I am the greatest among those with testicles, too" (62). This proves her poetic prominence and her competitive spirit in an environment celebrating mostly male poetic production. The poet Bashar ibn Burd describes women's poetry as lacking proficiency except that of Khansa whose poetic productivity exceeded those of male poets (67). Ibn Burd's gender-biased description of women's poetic production conveys the reductionist and sexist perception of Arab women's poetic expression. However, he acknowledges that Khansa was able to achieve poetic greatness and uniqueness.

As most resources about Khansa's life mention, the loss of her two brothers formed a turning point in her life. She spent the rest of her life roaming and mourning the loss of her brave generous brothers and continuing to express the pre-Islamic ways of mourning (the shaved head and the pre-Islamic mourning dress) even after embracing Islam. Her persistence in expressing pre-Islamic values was controversial among her kinsmen of Bani Sulaym. They approached the caliph Ummar ibn al-Khattab to convince her to abandon her melancholic grief for her pagan brothers. However, after reciting some verses of her elegiac poetry, she instead convinces him of the need for her deep grief, for her brothers did not witness and benefit from the grace of Islam (al-Shati 47). This anecdote emphasizes Khansa's independence and her capability to challenge dominant societal traditions and convince a powerful man like the caliph to succumb to her wish.

Khansa's life and poetic oeuvre evoke symbolic meanings to which many Arabs relate. Khansa's persistent melancholic grief denotes her loyalty to the memory of her brothers, who represented "izwa," meaning people to whom one belongs. Her devotion is inflected by the cultural environment and social structure in which she lived. Khansa's story is one prominent example in Arab culture of a strong relationship between brother and sister breaking down the oppressor/oppressed binary that hegemonic discourses enforce when representing the relationship between Arab women and their male kinsmen. Mohja Kahf, in her article "Packaging "Huda": Sha'rawi's Memoirs in the United States Reception Environment," critiques the way Arab women are represented in Western hegemonic discourses as either victims, or escapees, or pawns. Through comparing Sha'rawi's original book *Mudhakkirati* to the translated version *Harem Years*, Kahf highlights the fact that "*Mudhakkirati* evinces a woman who, far from desiring escape from her people, saw women's liberation as something nourished by love for her family and rooted in her own culture" (156). This can also apply to the story of Khansa,

whose productivity is rooted in her own cultural environment, which promoted elegy as a genre produced by women to celebrate ideals rooted in the Bedouin social structure, such as chivalry, generosity, and bravery. Muhammad Jabir al-Hini states that “Lamentation stems from a sense of the complete attachment of the individuals to the group and the dependance of the group’s security on the individual. It also stems from a feeling of emptiness that the deceased left behind; a feeling that suggests a desire to be filled” (126). Thus, Khansa’s elegies are integrated in the cultural environment of her time, and they do not reflect passiveness as much as they reflect great mastery of poetic themes and skills of her society. Her legacy influences Arab women writers whose elegies transcended the traditional lamentation structure dedicated to the loss of a person, expanding to lament the loss of lands, cultures, and identities. For example, Sudanese poet Rawdha al-Haj’s poem, “An Urgent letter to Khansa,” reflects this broadening scope of the elegy. In this poem, the poet addresses Khansa, complaining to her about the multiple losses Arabs have experienced, such as the loss of lands and the loss of dear ones. The tone of the poem is melancholic, using images and vocabularies loaded with meanings of despair, loss, and pain, reflecting the poet’s concern with how fragmented her people have become. Al-Haj uses the figure of Khansa in her poem to draw comparison between the poet’s legendary anguish and the suffering of modern Arabs. Al-Haj draws on her literary foremother, Khansa, to share her melancholic affect and give significance to her grief. Through dialogue addressed to Khansa, the poet creates a feminist consciousness that rejects colonial and neocolonial ideologies that lead to the destruction of the Arab world. Calling on a heritage of foremothers, the poet laments the loss of dignity stemming from silent and ineffective Arab governments and the destruction of Arab cities, such as Baghdad, Beirut, Khartoum, Jerusalem— cities that have a deep connection to Arab’s cultural and historical identity.

As shown above, Khansa is an Arab female figure who is constantly regenerated in Arab culture. Khansa's story and her elegies are associated with loyalty, strong personality, sacrifice, and, mainly, loss and grief. In Chicana culture, the figure of La Llorona is also continuously renewed and reinterpreted by Chicana writers, and the story of the legendary figure La Llorona also revolves around loss, grief, and mourning. From a patriarchal and colonial hegemonic perspective, she is depicted as a villain, a bad woman who murders children. However, from a postcolonial Chicana feminist perspective, she is reinscribed as an Indigenous Chicana figure and is given new roles that break down hegemonic representations. She suffers multiple losses: her children, her lover, her life, and her nation. Her wailing and mourning are incessant, and she is doomed to roam the earth weeping for her losses. The melancholic in Freud's theory suffers a continual recounting of loss so that their painful experience is present and never forgotten. La Llorona's wailing continues as her story is retold through generations. In Chicana literature, she is the representative and symbol of melancholia. Domino Perez describes her in *There was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* as "a living entity" as her story is perpetually regenerated (2). La Llorona, Perez claims, speaks to Chicanas as an "eternal mother" who never forgets her children (36). Viewing La Llorona as a mother to Chicanas and mestizos (people of mixed Spanish and Indigenous ancestry), Perez sees in La Llorona a symbol and articulation of contemporary Chicana reality. Revisiting her legend, therefore, has the power to open new vistas and new conversations on Chicana life, culture, and community (36). Perez shows the significance of the legacy of La Llorona in creating a new understanding of Chicanas' positionality. The story of the wailing woman is crucial in discussing the subjectivity of Chicanas. The malleability of La Llorona and her melancholy allows Chicanas to reinterpret this

story and to use her figure to undermine the reductionist and misogynist representations that limit Chicana's agency and misrepresent them.

Freud thinks that melancholy cannot be healed, and the melancholic suffers from psychological damage because she holds onto her past. On the contrary, some Chicana writers focus on their past as a useful strategy to reimagine their present, and they keep their past alive to keep their history and identity from erasure. The importance of the painful and melancholic story of La Llorona lies in its connection to the hegemonic representation of Chicana women and the coding of their subjectivities as threatening and dangerous. The figure of La Llorona stands for a painful past and the suffering experienced because of gender discrimination, and it inspires Chicanas with innovative and rejuvenating strategies of resistance.

Chicana struggles in the U.S. Southwest are intersectional: they are marginalized by U.S. imperialism and patriarchal hegemony. The Chicano patriarchal system marginalizes and silences Chicanas and has attempts to confine them within rigid gender boundaries. U.S. imperialist ideologies have categorized Chicanas/os as second-class citizens. They have been excluded from political roles and have suffered from decades of political and economic discrimination. They have been forced to assimilate into the dominant American culture, often prohibited from speaking Spanish and from embracing their original culture and heritage. Part of this process of cultural erasure is distorting and misrepresenting prominent Chicana female figures. Hegemonic imperialist and patriarchal discourses read the legend of La Llorona as a mere existentialist example of the bad woman and failed mother, an image which Chicana writers, such as Sandra Cisneros, Cherry Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, among others, work to deconstruct and rebuild as an alternative image of the Chicana woman. The history of the myth of La Llorona precedes the Spanish colonization. Some scholars trace its roots back to Aztec

tradition where she is connected to a Nahuatl legend in which a woman with supernatural powers seduces men working or walking alone (Paredes 103). Other scholars think that its origin comes from one of the Aztecs goddesses, Cihuacoatl, or the “serpent goddess of Toltecs, Aztecs, and other nations” (Leal 135), who was “demonized” in Spanish colonial ideologies and transformed from a celebrated goddess to a terrifying demon woman: dressed in white, roaming at night, and wailing for her children (136). La Llorona was linked to child abduction and sacrifice and became a frightening story for children and a cautionary tale for men concerning the dangers of women. The tale also contains a message for women: “On its face the tale teaches that girls get punished for conduct for which men are rewarded; that pleasure, especially sexual gratification, is sinful for women; that female independence and personal agency create monsters capable of destroying even their offspring” (94). This colonialist and misogynistic representation of La Llorona was intended to curb Chicana women’s agency and reinforce their Otherness. Linda C. Fox states that patriarchal misrepresentations of La Llorona’s legend are meant to enforce gender boundaries and that “the legend’s real message is directed towards women: Conform to your role, comply with feminine imperatives, or suffer the consequences” (21-2).

I argue that the legacy of Khansa and La Llorona can be traced in the novels selected for this study, *Tashari (Dispersed)* and *So Far from God*, which present the concept of loss resulting from colonial and imperial hegemony. They are centered around women turning the melancholic affect of their loss into a productive tool for survival. The protagonists in both novels lose their land, family, and identity due to colonial and imperial schemes, and they enact dynamic subjectivities resisting the colonial and imperialist powers erasing Indigenous cultures and identities. *Tashari (Dispersed)* by Kachachi is a novel about the loss of homeland and the dispersion of Iraqis that intensified after 2003. The novel presents the dispersion of Iraqi

Christians who fled from Iraq to the diaspora after losing their safety and tranquility. The tone of the novel is somber, reflecting the sorrows and anxieties of the protagonist, her daughter, and her niece. All three women are exiled, and the novel is narrated from the protagonist's niece's point of view. The narrative reflects the fragmented and dispersed condition of these women. Through the use of flashbacks, the novel depicts the life of Wardia, the protagonist, in the past in juxtaposition with her life, and the lives of the other women in the novel, in exile in the present. The title of the novel is embedded in the Iraqi national and local culture and imbued with the idea of dispersion through the writer's use of the word "tashari," which is an Iraqi colloquial word loaded with meanings of loss, separation, and dispersion. Wardia's niece, the narrator (who composes poetry mourning the loss of her homeland and her family), references this meaning in her conversation with her son, Iskandar, when he asks her about the title of her diwan *Tashari*. She elaborates using the Arabic proverb: *tafaraqū aidi Saba'*, which means "Saba's people are scattered in different ways and places."² It is used to refer to people who have been dispersed and separated without the possibility of reunification.

Edward Said describes the effect of exile: "It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (173). Losing home and place of belonging keeps the exiled in a state of ongoing melancholia, mourning the loss of roots and land. *Tashari (Dispersed)* is a representation of the multiple losses that Iraqi immigrants encountered in their search for an

² Saba' is a place located at the South of Arabia on the trade road between India and Africa. It is inhabited by Arab tribes whose story is mentioned in the Torah and the Qur'an. The Saba' people are punished for their arrogance and disbelief in God and for their ingratitude for the numerous blessings they are granted. God drowns them and turns their fruitful gardens arid, and they are scattered throughout the land. From this comes the proverb which means the Saba' people have become irrevocably separated and scattered.

alternative home. The novel centers around Dr. Wardia Iskandar, a retired gynecologist. She is a Christian Iraqi who is forced to leave her country and expatriate in Paris because of the numerous atrocities and non-stop violence in Iraq after 2003. Like a modern-day Khansa, she remains loyal to the memory of her lost homeland through her never-ending mourning. The novel begins with Wardia, along with other Christian immigrants, being taken from a refugee shelter to the Elysée palace to meet the French president, Nicola Sarkozy, in a ceremony honoring the Pope. Feeling estranged and lonely, she wishes that she was celebrating the moment with her late husband, Dr. Jirjis, as well as her immigrant children and her friends and acquaintances in al-Diwaniya city, where she spent most of her working years. She longs for the day of return and reunion with her scattered family members and looks for a space where she can reunite with them all, even if that space is only imaginary. Wardia's line of the story is narrated through the omniscient point of view, and her story is told through flashbacks that show her long, eventful life and reflect her Indigeneity and firm attachment to her country. She practices her job as a gynecologist and obstetrician in different parts of Iraq, moving from Mosul to Diwaniya to Baghdad (especially the most remote areas) and finds in every place in Iraq a home. This attachment is asserted in different places in the narrative. Her experience in al-Diwaniya (a city in southern Iraq) is given the metaphor of a tree that takes roots, grows, blooms, and bears fruit: "poets did not lie when they claimed that there are birthplaces for hearts, and she will register this place (Diwaniya) a birthplace for her heart and a pleasant sky that lavished her with generosity and warmheartedness" (translation mine 31). In immigrating, she is cut forever from those roots, her heart's birthplace, and left barren. The loss of one's place of origin is associated in the novel with other losses that should be mourned: family, language, identity, social status, etc. For Wardia, Iraq is the lost object that becomes part of her ego; it is the place where she

spent her life until her eighties; it is the place where her children were born and raised. She mourns the loss of her homeland and a host of other concrete or abstract things related to it, such as family and support. Intensifying her melancholic affect is the dispersion of her children in different parts of the globe:

as if a butcher took his cleaver and determined to dismember her body and disperse her shreds in different places. The liver was thrown to North America and flung the lungs to the Caribbean and left the arteries floating over the waters of the Gulf. As for the heart, the butcher took the sharp knife that is intended for delicate operations and slashed the heart with it, carefully lifting it from its reclining position between the Tigris and the Euphrates and rolled it under the Eiffel Tower while laughing out loud at what he had done. (Translation mine 17)

Wardia's children are compared to parts of her body horrifically torn away and scattered. Her son, Buraq, moves to a city in the Caribbean; her daughter, Hinda, relocates to North America, and her younger daughter, Jasmin, to Dubai. This dispersion represents the forced dismemberment of the Iraqi family body as a result of hegemonic colonial and neocolonial ideologies, and it leads to the diasporic subject's constant anxiety of identity erasure. Her fear of losing a sense of belonging to her homeland is demonstrated in her obsessive concern for her passport; she does not look at it as a mere document she can use when travelling but as the symbol of essential belonging to her country and her hope of returning: "I lose my sight and never lose it. This passport, which was my only proof of my Iraqi identity in this country and my evidence of my existence, which I fear for when I carry it in my handbag, and I fear for it when I leave it at home" (translation mine 66). In her eighties, Wardia's fear of losing her homeland and becoming unhomed becomes a reality that she must confront. War atrocities, sectarian conflicts, and ongoing violence turned Wardia's present into melancholic lamentation of her past. U.S. imperialist and colonial invasions and ideologies stripped her of her identity and homeland and transformed her from a well-known physician, surrounded by her family, relatives, colleagues, and friends, into a lonely immigrant seeking asylum in a foreign place. Without a job to occupy

her time or to benefit her people, she contemplates the idea of death and whether she will be buried in France or in her homeland. The novel reflects the obsession of the Iraqi expatriate; it emphasizes the burden of loss and the melancholy of uprootedness that Iraqi immigrants encounter in exile as they try to find alternative places to escape the atrocities of war and violence. As Christians, Wardia and her family were marginalized not only by colonial powers, but also by neocolonial powers and local ideologies which hail minority groups as an “Other.” Thus, the Christian Wardia and her family have become subjects of this hegemonic ideology that excludes Iraqi minority groups from the national matrix. After 2003, Iraqi Christians faced waves of political marginalization, displacement, and persecution. They were targets of killing and kidnapping by armed groups and militias for sectarian or criminal motives.

Wardia’s melancholy is not pathological. It reflects her loyal Khansa-like subjectivity to her homeland, history and culture. Moreover, she plays a crucial role that links the past to the present. Just as she helped women to give new life to the world in her career as a gynecologist and obstetrician, she also ushers in the new generation of conscientious diasporic Iraqis through her stories. She conveys all her knowledge about her country and culture to Iskandar, her niece’s son, who does not have strong connection to his parents’ homeland. The search for an identity and belonging to a place in which every loved one is gathered is the narrative’s focus, so the narrative construction is the result of an innovative idea put forward by Iskandar, who noticed his aunt’s torment and melancholia in exile. He invents an electronic cemetery which includes on its pages the graves of their family members, “all the loved ones he summoned for her came and formed with their graves a wall surrounding her to absorb her anxieties and concerns” (translation mine 110). Iskandar wants to heal his aunt’s melancholia through the creation of this hypothetical space to collect bones: “from the cemeteries of the Gulf and the Levant, Detroit and

New Zealand and the suburbs of London, and in which he blows from his talent to rest in a neutral land. He reunites the men and women who put heads on one pillow for decades, then they dispersed while they were dead in strange soils” (translation mine 191). After collecting the bones of those who were separated by wars, sectarian violence, and exile, he draws shrines for them, carves tombstones for them, and plants all the flowers chosen by the family for their lost ones. He also accompanies pictures of the dead with music and songs that the dead loved. This innovative collection serves to mourn these “precarious lives” that have been marginalized and ignored by hegemonic discourses (Butler 128-51). It is an electronic space where she can sleep next to her loved ones. Through imagination, this electronic cemetery links Wardia with her loved ones buried in faraway places and connects Iskandar with his culture and family as well. She engages him with her detailed stories and succeeds in transforming him from a weary person who lacks any interest in his parents’ and grandparents’ culture and history to a person full of vitality and invested in his roots, one who “came back to us and planted his banner in aunt Wardia’s plains” (translation mine 191). The novel reflects the Iraqi immigrant’s fears and anxieties of identity erasure and their concern for connecting new second generation immigrants to their roots and history. As in other novels by Ina’am Kachachi, such as *The American Granddaughter* (2008), the character of the grandmother represents the Indigenous and the national roots. *Tashari* emphasizes keeping national and cultural heritage through the creation of connections between older generations and younger ones.

War atrocities and sectarian violence deprived Wardia of her children who immigrated to different parts of the world to escape the struggles they faced in their country. Hinda, Wardia’s eldest daughter, is coerced to leave her homeland with her husband and her two children. Hinda is a tearful person, like her mother, and provides another example of Khansa-like subjectivity.

Her tears and melancholy never stop from the moment she first arrives in Toronto fleeing from the ongoing conflicts in her homeland. Through the character Hinda, the novel highlights what most Iraqi women face in exile. Hinda's tears never freeze in the Canadian cold. She insists on maintaining the connection between her children and their country of origin, refusing to sell all their belongings in Iraq because she does not want to deprive them of a foothold in a country they will always belong to. It is their "motherland" regardless of where they live (196). She mourns the loss of this home/homeland, for she believes that "home is not mere walls, a ceiling, a garden, and a roof; it has more meanings. No matter where you live or you go, you stay connected to your homeland" (translation mine 197). Hinda moves between different places: Iraq, Amman, and Canada, emphasizing the dispersion and instability of an Iraqi's life: "to find a home to settle in is a shaky idea. There is no secure place. Things escalated in Iraq and the return is a bitter joke, and after Wardia left the country, the joke became not funny anymore. Without mothers, homelands lose their value" (translation mine 202). While Hinda lived like a queen in Baghdad, as an immigrant in Canada, Hinda is treated like a second-class citizen and meets with constant humiliation and refusal as she looks for work (205). Assimilating to life in Canada is not easy for her, and she endures many tests and trials to achieve her goal of practicing her occupation as a physician. She spends four years to get a certificate of equivalency. She is forced to work in River Fisher, which is a remote area in Manitoba where no Canadian physician accepts to work. Moreover, she leaves her two eldest daughters with their father in Toronto and has to take the newborn daughter with her to work. However, she changes her fears and melancholic affect into a productive power that helps her overcome these obstacles. Like her mother, who succeeded against the odds at the beginning of her career in a conservative and remote area in al-Diwaniya, Hinda also succeeds in her job in a place described as "out of

service,” where the condition is much worse than it was in al-Diwaniya (213). She adapts to the new place and its people who are excluded and marginalized by governmental systems. Like her mother, she becomes the much-valued healer who takes care of the people in this marginalized community plagued with alcoholism and drug use. The Indigenous Canadians respect her as she respects them. Unlike white Canadians, Hinda understands the politics of the social and medical problems in the community, viewing alcohol and drugs as bribes to separate Indigenous people from their culture and distract them from claiming their rights (222). Otherness is what brings Hinda and this community of Indigenous people together. She shares with them a history of invasion and displacement, for what the Iraqis encountered after the 2003 war is similar to the colonial atrocities that these Indigenous people encountered at the hands of white settlers. They witnessed waves of displacements, brutal killings, and humiliations at the hands of the invader and were treated as the “Other” who must be muted and oppressed.

Despite her adjustment to the new life and the new community, Hinda remains melancholic and suffers from the traumatic effects of losing one’s place, feeling “the sorrows of her dispersed self among cities and continents” (translation mine 229). Her happiness with what she has achieved is not complete in her in-between positionality: “She is unhappy, and on any day, she will not be completely happy. There is bitterness under the tongue. There is unfairness lurking in some place in her intimate history because a hand has removed her from a previous life and shaken her pillars. Her foundation stone was shaken the day she received a second nationality” (translation mine 230). This melancholic subjectivity emerges as a result of the colonial and neocolonial powers that caused the loss of homeland and the dispersion of its people. The U.S. imperialist ideologies and the post-invasion chaos have turned Hinda’s homeland into a melancholic object that occupies a crucial part of her ego. However, her

melancholy is not pathological because she succeeds in adapting to life in the host country, and she plays different active roles as a mother of three children and a successful career woman. Melancholy over loss is productive in her case, for her mourning process requires investing in new objects: motherhood and career.

The narrator, Wardia's niece and Iskandar's mother, is another Khansa-like character who productively mourns the loss of her homeland and people. She is a writer. Forced to emigrate to escape the oppression of neocolonial power and dictatorship, she conveys her anxieties and melancholia concerning the loss of her country: "The yearning for Baghdad flogs me every day and executes the sentence of abandonment and denial. I departed it, and I was not satisfied with this departure. I lost the best country; the country of first love" (translation mine 243). She describes the agonies of her exile and the destruction of the homeland saying: "I lived war by correspondence, bombing smoke, financial difficulties, the agonies of lost and the black signs of condolences. I heard the rattles through the phone" (translation mine 243). She watches her son turn into a gravedigger, collecting the bones of dispersed Iraqis who suffer from trauma and loss. She documents those struggles and losses in her diwan *Tashari*, which reflects the anxiety and melancholy of Iraqi expatriates who lost hope in the homeland from which they have been uprooted and live grasping at lines of electronic communication. Waking up in a rush to check email and news, constantly forwarding information to lists of hundreds of addresses, bombarded by "munitions of emotions," holding and saving their country on screens (translation mine 240). Khansa-like in the persistence of their mourning, these characters cling to this electronic heritage to create a homeland and feed the persistent nostalgic affect of their exile.

The idea of loss and melancholia can also be found in Ana Castillo's novel *So Far from God*, which follows the losses encountered by Sofia and her four daughters. The events of the

novel are set in the present-day, small town of Tome, New Mexico. Sofia is a mother who encounters the traumas and melancholia of losing land, language, heritage, identity, and her children. These losses and traumas also result from colonial and imperialist hegemony and oppression. Chicanas have long endured racial discriminations and social marginalization in the U.S. due to policies that have forced Chicane/Latine to assimilate and have erased their identity and culture since the annexation of Mexico's northern territories in 1845-1848. The novel interrogates the losses and traumas encountered by Sofia and her daughters and shows the effect of institutional patriarchal and colonial systems. Sofia's losses are due to her borderland positionality. She is the subject of oppression by both her own patriarchal culture and the oppressive dominant culture of the U.S. In both spaces Chicanas feel excluded and treated as outsiders. She enacts La Llorona-like subjectivity, not the submissive bad mother who drowns her children in a desperate act of revenge but the mother who faces with her children the oppression of the hegemonic powers. Luis D. Leon states that Chicane/o writers find in La Llorona a "specter who travels the earth in search of her children across the borderlands" (6). Metaphorically, La Llorona is in search of the Chicane community that has been dispossessed of their homeland within the confines of the U.S. nation. Domino Renee Perez asserts that La Llorona "haunts the cultural landscape of our imaginations, reminding us of the necessity and consequences of acting out against oppression, but she also teaches us how to use our voices, whether wailing in protest or shouting in liberation, so that we may actively shape new cultural and social realities" (73). The re-inscription of La Llorona's myth sets the platform for Castillo and other Chicane writers to transform fixed and binary gendered myths into new consciousnesses in which Chicanas are depicted as subjects with agency.

This alternative consciousness can be found in Castillo's *So Far from God*. Sofia and her four daughters embody traits of the legend of La Llorona. Castillo presents Sofia as another La Llorona who does not abandon her children: "Sofia had not left her children, much less drowned them to run off with nobody. On the contrary, she had been left to raise them by herself. And all her life, there had always been at least one woman around like her, left alone, abandoned, divorced, or widowed, to raise her children, and none of them had ever tried to kill their babies" (161). Sofia is a survivor, who endures over tragedy. She loses her four daughters whom she raised on her own as a result of patriarchal and racial hegemonies. The novel disrupts the reductionist representation of bad woman/ mother and the processes of mythologizing that keep Chicana women oppressed, creating an alternative discourse that gives women agency and freedom. In the novel, La Llorona is reimagined as the mother of Chicanas, "Chicana international astral-traveler" (162), who travels all around the world looking for her children and "cried over the loss of thousands" (160). She is the loving mother who connects her children rather than abandons them. In mourning and searching for her lost daughters, Sofia enacts La Llorona subjectivity: "women have the power to transmute grief into a galvanizing force for change" (Perez 139-40). She is a strong-willed Chicana who rejects patriarchal and colonial traditions, and her story is a story of survival; she overcomes the adverse situations she and her daughters undergo. She opposes the myth of women's submissiveness, and she does not teach her daughters to be submissive: "The idea of a wailing woman suffering throughout eternity because of God's punishment never appealed to Sofia, so she would not have repeated it to her daughters" (160). Sofia does not find in the institutionalized story of la Llorona a just representation of herself and other women in her community.

Sofia and her daughters learn to enact a border subjectivity that breaks down borders of gender, race, sexuality, and religion. The long history of colonization and cultural discrimination of Chicanas provides inspiration for a non-binary tradition of subjectivity, one of the *mestiza*. This border subjectivity is a shifting subjectivity structured by multiple intersectional factors—gender, class, race, sexuality. It is not limited to one-sided representation, and it shows flexibility and tolerance because it results from essential mixedness, the blending of Indigenous and Spanish. It responds tactically and productively to conflicting ideologies and powers. It is capable of configuring and centering itself depending on the detriment or form of oppression to be confronted. Chela Sandoval calls this shifting process “the differential consciousness” which straddles multiple cultures and multiple ideologies: “the differential mode of oppositional consciousness depends upon the ability to read the current situation of power and of self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological form best suited to push against its configurations, a survival skill well known to oppressed people” (Sandoval 90). This mode of consciousness serves as a strategy of resistance to dominant ideologies: U.S. culture and policies and Chicano patriarchy. In *So Far from God*, the narrative decolonizes the Anglo-American colonial and hegemonic ideologies and patriarchal gender roles that categorize subjectivities according to hierarchical power relations and situate Chicanas as an “Other” that must be kept at the bottom of the hierarchy. The novel provides an oppositional consciousness that adopts alternative ideologies different from essentialist notions of subjectivity. The narrative disrupts the reductionist representation of Chicana women and undermines archetypal figurations bringing a new understanding of Chicana subjectivity/identity.

Sofia’s oppositional consciousness rejects fixed hegemonic ideologies, enacts an anti-stereotypical agency, and deals with her loss (the loss of her four daughters due to racial and

patriarchal hegemony) productively. She disclaims patriarchal and colonial reductionist roles imposed on women. Thus, she becomes a stronger woman and the household matriarch after her husband abandons her with her three daughters. She takes the traditional male role, she becomes the financial provider, and she plays a dynamic role in maintaining the financial stability for the family. Moreover, she transmits antihegemonic cultural values to her daughters by teaching them strategies of survival and resistance. When her gambler husband returns to them after his long disappearance, she accepts him in her household. However, she decides to sue for divorce when he gambles off her family inheritance, releasing herself from social, religious, and patriarchal borders and taking control of her life. Through adopting the differential consciousness, she chooses to move from the periphery to the center, changing her subalternized positionality from the “abandoned” woman to the village mayor. Sofia leads her community to survive economic and political hardships inflicted by hegemonic capitalist and colonial systems. She constructs a female empowered household and succeeds in grassroots activism and the development of her community.

The ailments of colonialism, patriarchy, modernity, and capitalism bring about the loss of Sofia’s daughters who fall victim to gender and racial discrimination as well as war violence. Through Sofia and her daughters’ loss, the novel critiques dominant discourses and their construction of subjectivity as one-dimensional fixed entity. Esperanza, Sofia’s eldest daughter and Chicana activist leading protests in the Chicano Movement, is chosen as a TV reporter and sent to Saudi Arabia to cover the First Gulf War. She is betrayed by her boyfriend, Ruben, but she does not wail for this loss; instead, she chooses to be more productive, although her decision leads her to death. She undergoes kidnapping and torture, and her body is never brought back home. Ironically, she is awarded a posthumous medal for her martyrdom by the U.S. Army, the

military arm of the very system that she opposed (195). Esperanza chooses La Llorona to convey the news to her family: “Who better but La Llorona could the spirit of Esperanza have found, come to think of it, if not a woman who had been given a bad rap by every generation of her people since the beginning of time and yet, to Esperanza’s spirit-mind, La Llorona in the beginning (before men got in the way of it all) may have been nothing short of a loving mother goddess” (163). This anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial re-inscription of La Llorona stands for a feminist oppositional consciousness that re-represents Chicana women.

Caridad is Sofia’s other daughter who also falls victim to patriarchal and colonial hegemony. She is “the sister of the porcelain complexion” with a perfect-shaped body for which “men were inclined to show their unappreciated appreciation” (26). At first, she represents the embodiment of the patriarchal notion of the “good woman” who dedicates herself to the good of her male partner and does not seek to achieve agency or self-empowerment. Despite being cheated on by her high school sweetheart and husband, Memo (the trauma which causes her three miscarriages), she tries to keep up with him for several years. However, he rejects her in the end, and she undergoes an emotional and mental breakdown. To ease the pain of her failed marriage and lost pregnancies, she embarks on a path of heavy drinking and casual sex. She is abused by the males in her community and categorized as a “bad woman” who indulges in sexual intercourse with multiple men. It is patriarchal discrimination that causes her emotional instability and imposes the “bad woman” identity on her. Moreover, she is raped by male attackers outside one of the bars she attends, and she barely survives: “Among them were the sheriff’s deputies and the local police department” (33). The patriarchal system finds no fault in marginalizing and abusing overtly sexual women. However, her experience prompts her to adopt an alternative consciousness which enables her to embark on an adventure of spirituality and

community service as she becomes a *curandera*. Her resistance to patriarchy and its violence combines a strategic adoption of Indigenous traditions and values and the rejection of heteronormative gender ideologies. Chased by a jealous male admirer (Francisco el Penitente, who represents the embodiment of fixed patriarchal religious ideologies), Caridad jumps down a cliff holding Esmeralda's hand (Esmeralda is Caridad's mixed-blood Indian lover), and they disappear. The narrative creates an alternative representation of Chicana identity, a representation that dismisses reductionist and essentialist patriarchal categorization of women.

Sofia's daughter Fe is the embodiment of Chicana's assimilation and embrace of the U.S. hegemonic culture, as she works hard to attain the American Dream. She is an ambitious perfectionist and does not feel proud of her family and culture: "she kept away from her other sisters [except Esperanza whose appearance on TV as a reporter gives Fe some prestige among her co-workers at the bank], her mother, and the animals, because she just didn't understand how they could all be so self-defeating, so unambitious" (28). Her well-planned life seems to collapse when her fiancé abandons her on the eve of their wedding day, and she also suffers a severe nervous breakdown. She screams and sobs for weeks until she loses her voice: "Fe, who in her ravings had inadvertently made herself into a human tamale—all the while letting out one loud continuous scream that could have woken the dead" (30). Fe is another incarnation of La Llorona; her screams and loud sobbing indicate her rejection of patriarchal indifference and oppression. In addition to male indifference and discrimination, Fe falls victim to hegemonic capitalist systems. In order to get "the long-dreamed of automatic dishwasher, microwave, Cuisinart, and the VCR," (171) she leaves her job at the bank and works at Acme International, where the workers clean weapons for the Department of Defense with highly toxic cleaning products, toxins which led to her death by cancer: "She had cancer on the outside and all over the

inside and there was no stopping it by then” (186). Her situation was so severe that “at the time of her death there was so little left of Fe to be buried away” (186). She worked in severe conditions, and she was not rewarded for her hard work and commitment; instead, she is denied any medical assistance or financial support from her employer. The narrative shows Fe does not embrace the Chicana identity or its differential consciousness; instead, she tries to uproot herself and embrace the hegemonic culture. Fe’s death symbolizes U.S. imperialist policies and oppressive ideologies that exploit and marginalize poor Chicana laborers. Through the story of Fe, the narrative provides a critique of the U.S. imperialist institutions and military arms industry that destroy Fe’s life and health and have caused severe environmental crises that affected numerous regions inhabited by poor minorities.

La Loca is Sofia’s fourth daughter. Infected with AIDS, La Loca dies at the age of twenty after avoiding all contact with other human beings during most of her life. This is her second and last time experiencing death. At the age of three, la Loca resurrects after an epileptic attack. The priest of the church of Tome doubts her resurrection and supposes that it might be an act of Satan (23). After this early event, she is categorized as an “Other” or an outsider because she deviates from the “norms” of Chicano patriarchy and the Catholic Church, eventually adopting an alternative female-centered approach to healing and spirituality. She challenges the authority of the male-centered and institutionalized doctrine and tells the priest: “Remember, it is I who am here to pray for you” (24). Thus, he questions her agency and accuses her of insanity: “Father Jerome took pity on her and finally dismissed Loca as a person who was really not responsible for her mind” (221). She is viewed as insane or a “simpleton” by her community, but the narrative provides evidence for her agency and efficacy as she helps her sisters, Caridad and Fe, heal from the ailments they encounter as a result of gender and racial discrimination. The

dominant patriarchal community fails to see “how effective she could be in handling circumstances that were beyond most people’s patience, not to mention ability” (151). Thus, she chooses to isolate herself from the community and disassociate herself from the man-made world and the institutionalized church, placing herself in the natural world that increases her spiritual and healing powers. Castillo ties La Loca to the legend of La Llorona, for both are associated with madness. However, Castillo’s La Llorona is sympathetic and protective, for she sympathizes with La Loca and regularly appears to her at the irrigation ditch near her mother’s house, where La Loca spends most of her time. La Llorona informs La Loca of the death of her sister Esperanza: “La Llorona here functions as a truth bearer, not a monster to be avoided” (Halperin 100). Having had no exposure to the myth of La Llorona, La Loca does not fear the wailing woman, and they sympathize with each other. La Loca chooses to construct a resistant space where she creates her own values and traditions away from patriarchal and colonial hegemony: “She had grown up in a world of women who went out into the bigger world and came back disappointed, disillusioned, devastated, and eventually not at all. She did not regret not being part of that society, never having found any use for it” (Castillo 151-2). She becomes more connected to Chicana Indigenous values and traditions, and she constructs a Chicana identity free from any hegemonic authority. She supports the oppressed women in her family and her community, prays for them, and heals their ailment and suffering.

Like that of most Chicana women, the suffering of Sofia and her daughters occurs in a context of U.S. colonizing conditions. Chicana suffer from losing homeland, which, in consequence, precipitates identity erasure and other losses. The narrative shows how the Anglo-American colonization of the northern parts of Mexico resulted in huge economic losses for the Chicana community who were forced to leave their lands and abandon their mestiza identity:

there were a lot of outsiders moving in, buying up land that had belonged to original families, who were being forced to give it up because they just couldn't live off of it no more, and the taxes were too high... The truth was that most people had not been able to live off their land for the better part of the last fifty years. Outsiders in the past had overused the land so that in some cases it was no good for raising crops or grazing livestock no more. (139)

This settler colonization stripped Chicana from their land and caused them to be treated as outsiders who should pay taxes for their own land. However, the melancholia of losing the land has a productive effect on Sofia. She decides to engage herself in projects to help her community survive through the hard economic conditions they endure. After her many losses, she adopts a revolutionary subjectivity, and like her daughter Esperanza, works to "change the 'system'" through collective and communal cooperation: "the only way things are going to get better around here, is if we, all of us together, try to do something about it" (143). Sofia establishes a consciousness that rejects mainstream hegemony, believing that their land and identity can be restored through communal effort. She becomes the mayor of Tome by enacting differential subjectivity that forges ahead even in male-dominated positions. The narrative promotes a postcolonial feminist consciousness that reconstructs Chicanas' identity as powerful. Sofia leads a community of women and helps enhance their economic situation through opening a sheep-grazing enterprise: "the business created and sustained the livelihoods of more than two dozen women. As cooperative owners of their wool-weaving business, they had paying jobs they could count on and were proud of and the mothers among them didn't worry so much about their babies and childcare because they could bring their 'jitos to work'" (147). With a vital matriarchal agency, Sofia challenges the hegemonic capitalist system and creates a female utopian work community where women workers do not suffer from unsafe labor conditions. The narrative presents Sofia as a reincarnation of the legend of La Llorona, who is perceived by most of Chicana writers and thinkers as wailing for the loss of her Chicana/o children who have suffered

from the Anglo-American imperialist ideologies. The narrative re-envisioned La Llorona's legacy in communities of productive and active women.

The theme of loss and mourning constitutes an important link between the selected novels. In each text, the loss is caused by colonial and imperialist interventions. In both novels, land/country functions as a crucial locus of loss, which leads to the broader losses of family and identity. Both *Tashari* and *So Far from God* present women productively mourning the loss of their families/children and land/country. Wardia and Sofia each serve as examples of productive female mourners who transform the melancholia of loss into a new agency, an agency opposed to male-constructed one-dimensional perceptions and stereotypes. The cause of their loss of families and lands is similar: U.S. imperialist and colonial ideologies. Both Iraqis and Chicana endured the damaging consequences of U.S. imperialist policies. Sofia loses her four daughters due to Anglo-American imperialist schemes, which ghettoize Chicana community, inferiorize them, and erase their mestiza identity in favor of the dominant American identity. Wardia loses her home, land, and family because of the destructive effects of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Despite their losses, Sofia and Wardia manage to generate resilient and resistant subjectivities that show a productive connection to the lost object rather than passively wailing and mourning their loss. Sofia transforms her peripheral positionality into a central more productive one after the death of her four daughters and supports and helps other marginalized women in her community. Wardia maintains a productive connection to her lost country and family members through telling her story to her grandson and resisting loss and dispersion, even hypothetically. The female characters in these two novels move beyond the reductionist masculine representation of women's grief and enact active subjectivities that produce a counternarrative in which their melancholia is not pathological.

Kachachi's *Tashari* and Castillo's *So Far from God* introduce us to a new consciousness adopted by the protagonists, and the other women in the narratives, as they face loss; it is a productive consciousness that transforms loss into a powerful incentive for change. They enact Khansa-like and La Llorona-like subjectivities in their mourning of land, family, and identity. Their grief and melancholia are not pathological and unhealable but productive and progressive. Thus, they undermine the gendered perception of mourning and melancholia and produce anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial subjectivities. With these subjectivities, the protagonists voice loss beyond gender constraints, recuperating historical and legendary foremothers, and reviving the powerful lore of these figures and their important role in constructing Iraqi and Chicana identities.

Chapter Three:

Shahrazad and La Malinche: Transforming the Archetype

In response to imperialist ideologies and discourses that disempower and silence Arab and Chicana women, contemporary Arab and Chicana women writers resurrect the tropes of Shahrazad and La Malinche to provide counternarratives that praise Arab and Chicana women's resourcefulness and survival. The identities and legacies of Shahrazad and La Malinche have been distorted in mainstream discourses. Instead of focusing on their skills and knowledge, Eurocentric colonialists and scholars turned these two figures into archetypes of passive or erotic women. The Iraqi writer, Lutfiyya al-Dulaimi, and the Chicana writer, Sandra Cisneros, question the fixed gendered representation of these two figures in their short stories, "Shahrazad and Her Narrators" (1999) and "Never Marry a Mexican" (1991), respectively. These authors present a counternarrative to the dominant ideologies and disrupt the gendered representation of these two figures. In order to fully understand the counternarrative presented in these stories, I will present each figure and demonstrate how her legacy was distorted.

The fictional female figure, Shahrazad, has been the subject of many discussions and debates related to Arab women and their representation in mainstream discourses. At the hands of European writers and translators, such as Antoine Galland, Jonathan Scott, William Lane, Edgar Allan Poe, John Barth, among many others, Shahrazad has become the epitome of eroticism, submission, and lack of agency. Muhsin al-Musawi states that "the colonizer who feminizes the land to be conquered and exploited has already appropriated the Arabian tales in the receiving Western culture, and Scheherazade has almost lost identity in the West" (15). European translators and writers have changed the ending of the original story of Shahrazad, transforming her from an open-ended storyteller to a wife and a mother and limiting her creative

subjectivity. The adaptations of the frame story of the *Nights* show that the adapters were not interested in the idea of fidelity to the original text as much as establishing a colonial discourse that shapes a hierarchical power relation between the European colonizers and the colonized Arab countries. Richard Van Leeuwen states that “the work was ruthlessly appropriated by the translators to be reshaped according to their tastes, political interests, and ideological outlooks, and to fit in the broader colonial discourse shaping Europe’s relations with its Other” (33). To enforce their prejudiced and stereotypical depictions of the non-European Other, and to appeal to European readers, European translators enforced European values and gender hierarchies through limiting Shahrazad’s role and distorting the closure of the original text of the *Nights*. Shahrazad’s creativity and storytelling were curtailed by European translators, and she was tamed as a wife and a mother in the end. Interestingly enough, male Arab writers, such as Naguib Mahfouz, Taha Hussein, and Tawfiq al-Hakim, adopted these colonialist distortions of Shahrazad and demonstrated the influence of reductionist views by European writers. Hanadi al-Samman describes the influence of European views on twentieth century depictions of Shahrazad in Arabic literature, and she states that “when Shahrazad finally makes her debut in adaptations of contemporary Arabic literature in the early twentieth century, she has been estranged from her Middle Eastern tradition, forced to exhibit foreign sensibilities borrowed from these exotic translations” (6). These ideological incarnations and appropriations of Shahrazad’s cultural heritage impacted the perception of Shahrazad’s identity in Middle Eastern literature as well as European literature. Al-Samman shows that, in modern poetry, the resurrection of Shahrazad’s archetype is focused on its ambivalent representations. She concludes that the “vacillation between attraction and aversion is what characterizes most of the poetry that evoked Shahrazad. She is at once a savior and a slave, a deliverer and a death trap” (8). Al-Samman contends that

the Shahrazad we encounter in poets' works, such as 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati's collection *Al-Mawt fi al-Hayat* (1968) (*The Living Dead*), is not the skillful narrator who plays a revolutionary role in saving her life and those of other women; she is an example of the "living dead" because she acquiesces to the shah's tyranny. Moreover, Tayseer al-Saboul, in his poem "What Has Not Been Said About Shahrazad" describes her as the "imposter" who is "incapable of changing the state of constant fear that continues to engulf her and the Arab nation" (8). Not only does al-Saboul negate the importance of her role, but he also associates her trope with the defeat and submission of the Arab nation. In addition, 'Abd al-Rahim Omar's and Yousef al-Khal's poetic renditions of Shahrazad's archetype also express the idea of the nation's death and acquiescence (9).

As for Arab feminists, Shahrazad has become their literary and cultural foremother, and many of them have followed her example in breaking down hegemonic ideologies through narrating and voicing their struggles. We can find the Shahrazad trope in Assia Djébar's *Ombre Sultane* (1987) which is about misogyny and women's quest for freedom, juxtaposing the stories of two women, Isma (the first wife) and Hajila (the second wife), and their struggles against their misogynistic, oppressive husband. The novel questions the institutions of polygamy and patriarchy through Isma's and Hajila's polygamous link which reincarnates the sisterly alliance of Shahrazad and her sister Duniyazad. Moreover, Leila Sebbar's *Shahrazad* (1982) also uses the trope of Shahrazad. This novel deals with the quest for identity of a second-generation Algerian youth. Sebbar's Shahrazad is intelligent and independent, seeking to break down gender boundaries and conventions and free herself from the stereotypical definition of femininity that confines her within the exotic mold. Fatima Mernissi's *Shahrazad Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (2001) offers insight into the misrepresentations of gender relations

in the East and how the West has a “harem” of its own. In *One Thousand and One Nights: A Retelling* (2014), Hanan al-Shaykh retells Shahrazad’s stories in a modernized way focusing on the tales of witty, creative women who manipulate their creativity and craftiness to survive. Dunia Mikhail uses the trope of Shahrazad in her diwan *The Iraqi Nights* (2013) where she personifies Shahrazad and tells the story of an ongoing war and its atrocities through her poetry which becomes her strategic way to survive in a world of loss and violence.

One of the reasons some scholars are wary to describe Shahrazad as feminist comes from the ending of the frame story of the *Nights*, when Shahrazad weds the king and gives birth to three sons. The Iraqi American scholar, Fedwa Multi-Douglas, states that the closure “stands in contrast with the somewhat feminist implications of the prologue of the frame story” where Shahrazad appears as “an independent, courageous [woman], risking her life to save those of her sisters, and in the process...controlling the situation and educating the monarch” (27). From the perspective of some feminists, the closure promotes patriarchal domination and gender hierarchy: “As the women become objects of desire, the male has regained his active role and the female her passive one. In place of her intellect, it is now Shahrazad’s physicality that comes to the fore” (27). Moreover, Multi-Douglas explains how the epilogue presents Shahrazad as the object of the tale not the subject; she is no longer the storyteller, and an anonymous narrator narrates her story (27). Thus, the focus is on Shahrazad’s physical capacity to provide children and on her domestic function as wife and mother, rather than her skills and talents as an intellect and producer of literature that assists the survival of herself and other women. Some Arab feminists refuse to follow her example because she relinquishes her role as an active discourse producer to that of the “perfect woman: mother and lover” (28). In an interview with NPR in 2013, Hanan al-Shaykh discusses feeling at first swayed by these mainstream feminist

interpretations of Shahrazad. She claims that Shahrazad's "passivity" exasperated her. She wanted Shahrazad to "poison him and finish with that" (al-Shaykh "Scheherazade"). She proceeds to say that Shahrazad has not been considered as a heroine by most Arab educated women who would reject her model and consider her a slave, sitting and telling stories to her master in order not to be killed (al-Shaykh "Scheherazade"). This rejection stems from the fact that this representation of Shahrazad relies on Eurocentric discourses that depict Arab woman as passive and submissive to patriarchal hegemony. Therefore, we find some Arab feminists, such as Joumana Haddad, who view Shahrazad as a product of colonialist caricature and a model of patriarchal submission. She starts her essay "I Killed Shahrazad" by saying, "I've never been a big fan of Shahrazad" (141). She critiques the scheme of "bribing the man" with her stories because it keeps women in the "compromising, inferior" position and does not teach resistance and rebellion (142). Haddad considers the trope of bribing a man opposed to Arab feminist's endeavors to resist oppressive entities and ideologies. Haddad's decision to kill Shahrazad is a response to the societal oppression that Arab women face as well as to the Western cliché of the oppressed Arab woman. Haddad's killing of Shahrazad is an attempt to change all the archetypal representations and false attributes and meanings attached to Arab women in hegemonic discourses.

However, most Arab women scholars and writers find in Shahrazad "a prototypical feminist" as Muhsin Jasim al-Musawi puts it in his *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (2003). They provide revisionist readings of the trope, such as Halah Kamal's *Qalat al-Rawiyah* (1999), different from those established by male writers and scholars. Arab feminists find in Shahrazad's narrativity an oppositional strategy to resist patriarchy and hegemonic powers because she "sustains a feminist presence of wit, resourcefulness and charm,

which proves to be disarming and challenging to patriarchal practices and assumptions” (75). Most Arab feminists and writers use Shahrazad’s trope as an example of the richness of Arab women’s experiences and their active subjectivities, capable of turning the aural and private into a space of oppositional discourse. Al- Shaykh herself describes Shahrazad as “the first feminist” (al-Shaykh “Scheherazade”) because her active subjectivity helped change the monarch and save other women from oppression. Fatima Mernissi describes Shahrazad as “a political hero” and “a liberator,” for she sacrifices herself and confronts the monarch to stop violence (46). Had she not had a mastery over multiple sources of knowledge and talents, and had she not had an incredible mastery over words and a prominent wit and craftiness, she would not have been able to influence the powerful king and save herself and others. Her intelligence and resourcefulness provide a model of feminist rebellion for many Arab women writers. Mernissi argues that Shahrazad should be viewed in the political context of her day, as a woman bravely willing to sacrifice herself to gradually influence the mind of the man in power. Her determination in the midst of her political situation, Mernissi contends, provides inspiration to modern Arabic women who may also feel equally helpless in politics (49).

Mernissi and many other Arab women scholars and writers use the Shahrazad trope to alter the Orientalist and colonial representations of Arab women, and they critique the exotic, mysterious, and oppressed images of Shahrazad and associated images of Arab women. Multi-Douglas critiques the reductionist depiction of Shahrazad as “a sexual being, who manipulates discourse (and men) through her body” (11). This depiction belittles Shahrazad’s active subjectivity: “Making Shahrazad represent beings of desire (or equating her with speech), confining her to the role of healer, draws attention away from both the strength of her personality and her mastery of the situation, while occulting male-female power dynamics” (13). Multi-

Douglas emphasizes Shahrazad's mastery and cleverness and critiques these non-feminist views of the skillful storyteller that interpret her orality as only time-gaining, or healing, or manipulation (the forged relationship between Shahrazad's body and her words) (12). This continual undervaluing of Shahrazad's mastery and initiative led modern Arab feminists and writers to reclaim Shahrazad and create a counternarrative, of Shahrazad in her proper place as a feminist role model and a literary foremother.

Suzanne Gauch, in her book *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam*, promotes Shahrazad as a "speaking agent" whose never-ending stories have generated a platform of resistance to hegemonic powers, such as Islamic fundamentalists and Western media representations of Arab and Muslim women (xi). Gauch asserts that Shahrazad is "neither subaltern nor Western feminist" (xiii) and her legacy is adopted by most Arab women writers to voice their resistance against hegemonic ideologies and discourses that cast them as "silent, oppressed, exploited, and uneducated victims" (xi). Gauch asserts that "Shahrazad is no political radical; the changes at which her storytelling ultimately aims are not violent. Rather, her stories bit by bit overcome what were once seemingly insurmountable boundaries and limitations to change" (xviii). Ferial Ghazoul asserts Shahrazad's role and craftiness in creating alternative discourse. By metamorphosizing women from "objects of sex" to "objects of sexual fantasy," Ghazoul claims, Shahrazad translates the concrete into the symbolic, replacing the signifier with the signified, opening possibilities for unlimited discourses in the process (23- 4). Ghazoul highlights Shahrazad's creativity in defying established understandings of gender and forging an alternative understanding of women's subjectivity that transcends the boundaries of the body and recognizes women as varied individuals. Through her storytelling, Shahrazad produces a new consciousness in which she is the creator of discourse and in which women have the upper hand.

This new consciousness deviates from the masculine discourses which are based on violence, sexuality, and subjugating the Other.

The Shahrazad trope has been used by most Arab women writers to reinscribe new identities and give voice to presumably silent women. Her legacy as a speaking agent has opened the door for a proliferation of literary productions critiquing hierarchical representations of gender relations and the marginalization of Arab and Muslim women. In Iraq, women writers strived to voice their struggles through their writing, especially after 2003. Living through decades of dictatorship, successive wars, embargo, economic destruction, traumas, military occupation, political corruption, terrorist violence, militia domination and many other atrocities, Iraqi writers, following the legacy of Shahrazad, became agents that voiced Iraqi society's sufferings, losses, and methods of resistance, breaking boundaries of patriarchy and (neo)colonization. Quoting Ina'am Kachachi's, Ikram Masmoudi asserts that the new generations of Iraqi women writers are influenced by the legacy of Shahrazad: "In the context of ongoing wars, occupation, exile and dispossession, this new generation of women writers— 'the granddaughters of Scheherazade, 'as Ina'am Kachachi calls them— use fiction as an investigative tool to record women's unique experiences of war, trauma and exile; 'their narratives speak more truth than all the bulletins of the world'" (18). Thus, like Shahrazad, Iraqi women writers employ their creativity and the power of words to convey their traumas and anxieties and to highlight these women's means of survival.

Similarly, Chicana writers find in writing and language a powerful domain of resistance. Chicanas and Iraqi women share a comparative history of marginalization and silencing by imperialist and colonial powers. Iraqi women have been disempowered by colonial, neocolonial, and imperialist powers. As this disempowerment intensified, they have been confined within the

boundaries of the domestic sphere after the U.S. invasion of 2003. Likewise, Chicanas suffered from decades of disenfranchisement and othering by U.S. imperialist policies that imposed ideologies of assimilation and misrepresentation. To voice their marginalization and misrepresentation Chicanas and Iraqi women writers have chosen writing as a tool to tell their stories of resistance through the reincarnation of historical and literary foremothers, such as La Malinche and Shahrazad, to present new subjectivities and new narratives that defy the mainstream masculinist Euro-American ideologies. In their writing, Chicanas present counter discourses that re-present the distorted identity of Chicanas. Chicana writers reconsider historical and archetypal configurations of Chicana women, revising figures viewed only within the dichotomy of the good and the bad by patriarchal and colonial ideologies. La Malinche is the historical representation of this hierarchical categorization of Chicana identity. In Mexican culture, La Malinche is represented as the disloyal and passive woman, for she helped the invader to conquer her land and destroy her culture by serving as his interpreter and lover: she is labeled the “bad” woman. Chicano patriarchal ideologies adopted this distorted representation of La Malinche. Octavio Paz describes her in his book *The Labyrinth of Solitude* as “the Chingada” literally (the penetrated/the raped). He contrasts La Malinche or “the violated Mother” to La Virgen de Guadalupe or “the Virgin Mother,” affirming their passivity. Guadalupe’s passivity is “pure receptivity,” for she is the one who “consoles, quiets, dries tears, calms passion” (85-6). On the other hand, La Malinche’s passivity is “abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood, and dust. Her taint is constitutional and resides ...in her sex. This passivity, open to the outside world, causes her to lose her identity: she is the Chingada. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she is Nothingness” (85-6). This shows the binary representation of Chicana identity. According to Chicano patriarchal ideology

and tradition, women's identities are classified into two archetypes: the Guadalupe archetype who invokes traits of obedience and passivity that serve patriarchal ideologies, and the Chingada, or the bad woman, whose passivity is a threat to patriarchal agendas. Paz states that La Malinche's passivity has made her lose her identity because she "embodies the open, the chingado, to our closed, stoic, impassive Indians" (86). Moreover, Paz refers to the pejorative use of the word *malinchista* as it refers to Mexicans who are influenced by foreign forces: "The malinchistas are those who want Mexico to open itself to the outside world: the true sons of La Malinche, who is the Chingada in person" (86). This ideology of "malinchismo" provokes a stigma that excludes Chicanas from the dominant vision of anti-colonial rebellion in addition to being ethnically excluded and marginalized by the U.S. dominant culture and discourse. Chicanas, especially those rejecting traditional and ideological gender roles, have been excluded from Chicano nationalist discourses. As Angie Chabram-Dernersesian asserts in her essay, "I throw Punches for my Race, But I Don't Want to Be a Man," Chicanas who practiced anti-colonial activism from a feminist perspective, replacing "macho with hembra" and "discourses of *compadres* and *carnalismo* with the discourses of *comadres* (sisters) and *feminismo* (feminism)," were demonized through association with the Malinche narrative, as women who opened themselves to the ideologies of foreigners (167-8). Chabram-Dernersesian claims that Chicana women opposed this patriarchal and dogmatic nationalism, which ignores the heterogeneous influences shaping Chicano/a identity, by reclaiming Malinche as "Malintzin" and retelling her story as a foremother to Chicana nationalism and feminism.

Those Chicanas' revision and reimagining of the figure of La Malinche challenged the patriarchal and hegemonic discourses which exclude them from national discourses. Chicana's redefining of this foundational archetype allowed them to reimagine themselves and their own

models of resistance. Sandra Messinger Cypess shows how these misrepresentations have distorted La Malinche's identity and turned her into an archetype of the treacherous and the passive woman: "La Malinche has been transformed from a historical figure to a major Mexican and Latin American feminine archetype, a polysemous sign whose significations, for all their ambiguity, are generally negative" (2). She clarifies that the Spanish records of La Malinche keep her silent despite documenting her roles and presence. That silence allowed her image and identity to be distorted and reinterpreted according to the Mexican patriarchal tradition. In the accounts of the Spanish conquistadors, she was Dona Marina, a symbol of desire and female passivity through which the Spanish read the entirety of the American continent, as feminized, desirable, and receptive. In advancing the goal of political independence, the Mexican, Cypess asserts, needed a reading of this figure to fit their new socio-political agenda (9). As a result, she became "the Mexican Eve" and a "symbol of national betrayal" (2). In both accounts, La Malinche was the silenced victim, the object of ideological and cultural hegemony.

La Malinche's identity was violated by both the white colonizer and the Mexican patriarchal resistance. She was frozen within two limited roles: a colonized object and a traitress. Camilla Townsend states that La Malinche was not the only one among the Indigenous people to side with the colonizers (6). De Alba asserts that the one to be accused with treachery is the Aztec's emperor, Moctezuma, whose actions led to the fall of Tenochtitlan in the hands of the Spaniards: "Curiously, no one ever accuses Moctezuma of betraying his people, of reaping the hatred of the subordinate tribes, of receiving the conqueror with open arms (or legs), of ignoring the prophecy that foretold of the collapse of the Aztec Empire, of buying a malinche's favors with gifts and tributes worthy of a god" (77). Thus, it is the man who violates the Indigenous culture, land, and tradition, not the woman. De Alba critiques Chicano patriarchal politics which

emphasize and adopt colonial discourses, especially those related to gender politics, to serve “to fulfill the sexist fantasies of the Chicano penis” (78) and to keep Chicanas within the fixed gender roles prescribed and perpetuated by the white male. De Alba finds in the legacy of La Malinche a prominent strategy of resistance adopted by Chicana feminists. For them, Malinche’s heritage represents oppositional consciousness, turning all the negatives of the pejorative term “Malinchista” into positives, because “Malinche also represents affirmation: of a woman’s freedom to use her mind, her tongue, and her body in the way that she chooses and to cultivate her intellectual skills for her own survival and empowerment” (78). Malinche chooses to enact an active subjectivity to break down the boundaries of gender oppression imposed by the colonizer. Chicana writers reincarnate Malinche’s legacy through presenting character examples that challenge the fixed dichotomous definition of gender imposed by the bourgeoisie white man through voicing the silenced everyday experiences of Chicanas. Maria Lugones defines this strategy of feminist resistance as “decolonial feminism” which is a critical tool that challenges coloniality/modernity, capitalism, and patriarchy and provides an alternative definition of gender that is intersectional and non-dichotomous: “it is within our possibilities to desire a sense of being a woman who does not follow the positions and aspirations of white men, but rather is a being different, distant, and at odds with whiteness, capitalism, normative heterosexuality, and neoliberalism, who arises from an understanding of dealing with the travails, difficulties, and possibilities of the times we live in”(36). Chicana writers follow this model of resistance and challenge dominant gender norms through embracing La Malinche’s surviving legacy and, in doing so, repositioning history on the side of the marginalized and victimized.

In Chicano patriarchal discourses, Malinche has been manipulated to oppress Chicanas, and she has been configured as part of the triad of conventional maternal figures: La Virgen de

Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona. La Malinche is conflated with the figure of La Llorona, as each of their stories contain similar themes. Both are associated with infanticide and the archetype of the bad mother, and both are set against the Virgin archetype which represents the good mother. The dichotomy of the bad mother/good mother has been enforced by Chicano patriarchal ideologies that reflect those of the Chicano Movement, which embraced a traditional concept of family and motherhood to control women and resist Anglo-American oppression and identity erasure. La Virgen de Guadalupe represents the ideal female figure, for she is obedient and enacts Christian values. She was used by Chicano anti-imperialist movements as a symbol of the “Ideal Chicana” and the “Ideal Mother” who is chaste and unselfish and does not abandon her people and culture. Chicanas were supposed to avoid following the example of La Malinche and La Llorona as they represent the negative form of motherhood. La Malinche had a child by Cortés, the Spanish conquistador. She was forced to leave and was married off to one of Cortés’s soldiers, Don Juan Jaramillo. La Llorona was said to have drowned her own children as an act of revenge for her husband’s betrayal. Both female figures were accused of betraying their own children. Domino Renee Perez states that “Malinche’s conflation with La Llorona arises primarily from the fictionalized fate of Malinche’s children. People often mistakenly contend that when Cortés announced that he was returning to Spain with “his” children, Malinche murdered her children in an act of defiance and personal agency rather than allowing them to be taken from her” (31). Perez asserts that this story has been spread to undermine Malinche’s power as it configures her as the “bad mother,” setting her as the negative female model. In addition, Malinche’s daughter by Juan Jaramillo has been ignored in historical records of Malinche’s legend which focuses only on Malinche’s male offspring. Instead of shedding light on her loss, hegemonic discourses accuse her of betraying her children and her people. Perez

states that Malinche did not kill her children, but she lost them: “one to assimilation and the other to history” (31), and, instead of blaming the colonizer for this loss, “history favors the villainization of a remarkable woman” (31).

From another viewpoint, La Malinche is a survivor, not a victim nor a disloyal woman: “In many ways, she was too smart, too much a woman of her time, linguistic (learning Spanish in six ways, speaker of Mayan and Nahuatl, the widespread, diplomatic language of the Americas), clearly physically fit and able to cross treacherous terrain, and full of the awareness that propelled her toward the Aztecs as much as it did Cortés” (Romero 10). She was intelligent and resourceful; she used her knowledge and mastery of different languages to survive and challenge multiple dominant powers. She transformed her situation from a silent slave to an active mediator. Chicana writers celebrate this aspect of Malinche’s legacy and adopt her cultural heritage as a counternarrative that subverts the prescribed and gendered hegemonic ideologies that marginalized and erased Chicana’s identity. The re-imagining of La Malinche is an attempt to empower Chicana women and claim their foremother’s heritage as mediator between two dominant cultures and conflicting ideologies. In poetry, Carmen Tafolla’s poem “La Malinche” is one of the famous texts that celebrate the heritage of Malinche. Inspired by the 1967 Chicano movement poem “*Yo Soy Joaquin*,” the poem deconstructs the mythification of Malinche’s story and presents La Malinche as a foremother of Chicana/o national identity and Chicana feminist oppositional consciousness: “But Chingada I was not/Not tricked, not screwed, not traitor/ For I was not traitor to myself/I saw a dream and I reached it/Another world...La razaaaa” (Tafolla 20). Another poem that re-imagines La Malinche is De Alba’s “Malinchista, A Myth Revised” which critiques the fictionalized aspects of the history of La Malinche in an ironic tone. The poem presents La Malinche as a powerful woman and survivor who seeks revenge after being

blamed for the betrayal of her people: “She is looking for revenge/Centuries she has been blamed for the murder of her child, the loss of her people, as if Tenochtitlan would not have fallen without her sin” (Romero and Harris 5). In addition to Tafolla’s and De Alba’s poems, Malinche’s legacy has been revived by other Chicana writers to undermine the misogynist and racial representations of this figure: Rosario Castellano’s “Malinche,” Naomi Quinonez’s “Trilogy,” Lorna Dee Cervantes’ “Baby you Cramp my Style,” and others (Rebolledo & Rivero 189).

Sandra Cisneros and Lutfiyya al-Dulaimi reclaim the distorted images of these two foremothers (La Malinche and Shahrazad) for Chicana and Iraqi cultures respectively. They undermine the peripheral representation of these figures and the effect of this representation on Chicana and Iraqi women. Cisneros and Dulaimi decolonize the gendered and misogynist images of these two figures through an oppositional discourse that breaks down the gendered marginalization of Chicana and Iraqi women, repositioning villainized feminine archetypes in the center of anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal discourse. Instead of seeing either La Malinche or Shahrazad as passive and silent figures or sexual objects, Cisneros and Dulaimi represent Malinche and Shahrazad as active agents who tell their stories of survival; they reclaim the legacy of these two figures and decolonize the archetype of the passive or erotic woman. Both archetypal figures are discourse transmitters, and their agency is connected to their voice and mastery of words and knowledge. Dulaimi’s and Cisneros’s short stories give a more nuanced representation of these two figures and defy the gendered, sexualized, and racialized images connected to these significant foremothers and commonly used to represent Chicana and Iraqi women.

In Dulaimi's short story, "Shahrazad and her Narrators," the hegemonic representation of Shahrazad is disrupted and critiqued through a dialogue between Shahrazad and her narrator. Through magical realism, Dulaimi revives Shahrazad and allows her to refute the hegemonic representations of her identity and that of Arab/Iraqi women in general and to question the passive positionality imposed on them. In postcolonial settings, magical realism is often used as a tool of resistance. By participating in this tradition, Dulaimi challenges the colonial and patriarchal distortion of Arab women and critiques the gendered marginalization and exclusion of Arab/Iraqi women as an "Other." Silencing women and excluding them from systems of representation and power ensure the continuity of the dichotomies of master/slave, man/woman, superior/inferior. Postcolonial women writers, such as Dulaimi, destabilize this ideology through the refiguration of Shahrazad. Dulaimi states in her book, *Sharikāt al- Masīr* (2013):

We find women in myths and epics, with their overpowering presence, fueling existence and taming time with calls for rebellion that deviate from the norms of human traditions in every age, so they glow in the feasts of their individuality and celebrate the majesty of femininity and the presence of the body and the declaration of desires taking their ability of daring disclosure as their own right and a means to overpass the complex human situation dominated by male gods and men and unjust teachings. (Dulaimi, translation mine 7)

For Dulaimi, women's ability to break silence and voice their sufferings in a male dominated world is a key tool to decentralize fixed representations of women's identity and gain equal positionalities as men. She critiques the hegemonic representation of women that limits their identity to two archetypes: the sacred and the profane (147). This archetypal representation results in systemic erasure of Arab/ Iraqi women's identity and misrepresentation of their real subjectivities. Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls this monolithic reductionist system of representation "third-world difference" which is a notion that refers to the discursive colonization and marginalization of the heterogeneous material and historical experiences of women in the so called third world. In colonized gendered understanding, Arab/ Iraqi women

have been reduced to passive and oppressed beings, and their active subjectivities have been silenced. This homogenization and colonization of these women's identities and subjectivities has also been adopted by mainstream feminists, who neglect the intersectional oppression that these women suffer from and focus only on gender oppression. Mohanty states: "the discursively consensual homogeneity of 'women' as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women. This results in an assumption of women as an always-already constituted group, one which has been labelled 'powerless', 'exploited', 'sexually harassed'" (53). This reductionist homogenous representation freezes Iraqi women in certain archetypes and does not give an accurate image of the nuanced historical and material reality of these women. Arab/Iraqi women are frozen in the Orientalist and colonial representation of Shahrazad: passive, silent, and object of male's sexual desires. They lack agency and their real experiences are reduced and stereotyped as either silent victims or sensual seductresses. Dulaimi revives the figure of Shahrazad in her short story to disrupt the hegemonic representation of this figure and, consequently, of Arab women. By holding a dialogue between Shahrazad and her narrator(s), she undermines the disparaged and exoticized representation of Shahrazad's agency and subjectivity. Through the dialogue between Shahrazad and her narrator(s), the writer reclaims Shahrazad as a feminist foremother who continues to fight, through her powerful voice and clever stories, against the oppression of women. The modern Shahrazad combats Orientalist and patriarchal discourses to allow the voices of her sisters to be heard.

"Shahrazad and her Narrators" begins with a detailed description of a man's obsession with the figure of Shahrazad. He is slavishly infatuated with her, seeking some of her glamour and fascination in every woman he meets. He confines himself to the world of the *One Thousand*

and One Nights, spending his time reading and studying what other writers and narrators wrote and said about her, developing a fantasy based on those writings:

...the legacy of Shahrazad besieges his world, filling it with her tales and deeds and wiles. Her artful language and seduction, her lows and highs, her wisdom, piety, vanity. From all this and from what storytellers had related of her, he creates a living idea, a celestial female body that takes form in successive rhythms. Stunned infatuation devoid of the mundane surrounding. Replicas of her celestial body invade the mirrors of his imagination and from all the scenery he can behold. (Dulaimi 32)

His infatuation and lust for Shahrazad is based on the distorted imaging created by hegemonic discourses that exoticize and sexualize her: “His obsession entices him to buy perfumes merely because their designers claim they have been inspired by her sensational and exotic scents” (32). He knows Shahrazad through the information he collected about her, and his desire for her is connected to the sensational and exotic representations provided by male narrators. He finds her cunning and manipulative, believing her storytelling skill is merely a time-gaining strategy, reducing her creativity, initiative, and mastery. In addition, he perceives her as a controlled being rather than the one in control. He believes that she marries the king and gives him three sons, and by doing so, he limits her to a role as mother and wife (32). Such reductionist masculine perception of Shahrazad belittles her cleverness and active agency as well as her power over words and storytelling.

The magical realist story revives Shahrazad to undermine the beleaguered representations of Arab and Iraqi women. Dulaimi reinterprets the archetypal representation of Shahrazad, and she rejects the depiction of this fictional figure as seductress or passive. In the story, Shahrazad appears to the man as an ethereal figure different from the image he fantasizes: “You don’t recognize me, of course, because your image of me is not quite what you see now. Your image is one shaped by storytellers, cut out of their fantasies of a woman desired by starved multitudes. You’re one of them. You failed to break away from the multitudes’ shackles of imaginary

pleasure” (34). Here, Shahrazad opens the dialogue with the man by rejecting the way her image and her heritage have been distorted and manipulated based on sexism and dichotomous gender relations. By fetishizing and exoticizing Shahrazad and diminishing her to a mere passive or seductive figure, European scholars and Arab male writers exclude her from power agendas and deny her the agency to create a change in gender relations. Influenced by these ideologies and reductionist representations, the man finds the reincarnated Shahrazad different from the one he has imagined. She is not the exotic being that male narrators fantasized over the years as the object of desire. The story shows that the reason behind his infatuation with Shahrazad is that “she might offer her last miracle for his own sake and in his own time” (32). His desire for her is self-centered and reflects his limited perception of her subjectivity; he thinks her miracle is the manipulation of her voice and her body which she used to seduce the king.

Dulaimi’s Shahrazad disproves the misrepresentation attached to her and her legacy and shows men’s/narrators’ lack of knowledge about her, her story, and her intellect. She halts the “lies” and deformations of her story and shows that she is not a victim who was forced to marry the king and bare him three sons. It was her choice to marry him despite her father’s disapproval, and she never bore the king children. The man’s distorted image of Shahrazad confines her within the role of the concubine who begs the king to keep her alive for the sake of his three sons, a claim which Shahrazad denies, describing it as “nonsense” and “preposterous lies” (35). From a feminist perspective, these distortions of the original frame text of the *Nights* aim at disempowering Shahrazad, confining her within a stereotypical positionality of the passive concubine who lacks feminist transformational agency. Such misrepresentations were intentional to enforce colonial and Orientalist agendas on Arab culture and instill the first seeds of ideological deformation of Arab/Iraqi women’s subjectivity.

Multi-Douglas contends, in her essay, “Shahrazad Feminist,” that Shahrazad is not as passive as she is presented in Orientalist literature. In the *Nights*, Shahrazad is the character in control. With her knowledge, wisdom, and intellect, she “performs a critical role in changing the dynamics of the male/female sexual relations, in redefining sexual politics” (359). Shahrazad’s agenda was transformational and reformatory. Dulaimi’s Shahrazad uncovers this agenda by denying the distorted ending of the tales and the existence of children. By emphasizing that she is not a mother, Dulaimi’s Shahrazad undermines patriarchal and Orientalist ideologies which would reduce her to her sexual and reproductive capacity and confine her, and consequently all Arab/Iraqi women, within the domestic sphere. Shahrazad addresses the man, who is nameless throughout the whole story, as a quasi-generic representation of patriarchal perception of Shahrazad and shows his (and her narrators’) ignorance and lack of perception. The dialogue between them unsettles the hegemonic misrepresentation of Shahrazad in Eurocentric translations and breaks down the stereotypical configuration of her as the archetype of the seductive woman who relies on her sexual prowess to save herself and please the monarch. The story refers to Shahrazad’s voice as the tool that she employs to survive, and it is her voice that has kept her stories and legacy from erasure. With her voice, she could save herself and other women from the tyranny of the king:

It was that voice that I lived on all those one thousand and one nights, and it was the one thing that breached the distance between my survival and the executioner’s sword. And it was the contours of that voice that gave life to those tales of wonders and miracles about monarchs and lands and jinns and love and lust and levity... That voice was a heavenly gift that brought me miraculous survival. (35-6)

Shahrazad’s voice and storytelling skill made her a foremother for Arab and Iraqi women writers, who either follow her example as a storyteller or evoke her as a speaking agent. Through her voice, she educates the monarch and changes his understanding of gender politics and his perception of women. Her role extends beyond the seductress or passive victim.

Because the man in the story has formed his perception of Shahrazad from reading thousands of the books composed by hegemonic and Orientalist powers, he cannot see her face clearly; it is covered with a “smoky veil” (36). The “avid reader,” Shahrazad, opposes the false knowledge the man gained from these books which she considers “worthless sheets and ink” (36). Her knowledge and tales are based on books composed by “creative and imaginative minds. Tales that go beyond your familiar world” (36). Her tales and creativity are not based on the static and fixed knowledge imposed by hegemonic powers: “It’s a matter of true creativity versus falsehood. In all ages history books don’t tell things as they happen; they tell what powerful people want them to tell. And the result? A mountain of books that blunt mind and soul” (36). Shahrazad challenges this false knowledge that marginalizes and disempowers women and instead chooses narration as an alternative strategy of resistance and survival. With her unique narrative skill and her wisdom and intelligence, she “paid tribute to the love of life” (37). She shows the falsehood and destructiveness of hegemonic patriarchal and colonial politics and strategies: “I dodged my demise; you dodged your life in a march toward death” (37). Dulaimi’s re-inscribed Shahrazad uses her hands and the skill of writing to continue the legacy of survival and resistance:

This is just a hand, and whatever ornament it possesses is the labor of tens of thousands of nights and days and events. It’s a tale more than a thousand years old woven by the sun and the moon and the stars—the tragedies and catastrophes, loss and tears, suppression and deprivation, arms and blood, fear and unquenched desire, love and joy and pleasure and intimacy, the quiver of locked bodies, their promises and bounty. Water and air and dust and heat and nectar and perfumes and rain and gazes and touches, the longing of males and the scribbling of females and the imagination of storytellers. This net, woven of time’s tested gold, is my current identity as my voice was my past identity. The hand is me. (37-8)

Dulaimi uses the synecdoche of the hand to refer to the process of writing and documenting Arab women’s stories of survival. Modern Shahrazad transcends the boundaries of exoticism and reduction and chooses to keep her legacy and identity from erasure and distortion through her

writing. She becomes the foremother for Arab women writers who write their stories and the stories of other women to change and unsettle the Orientalist perception of Arab women in mainstream literature. The author highlights the role of writing as a powerful tool used by Arab/Iraqi women writers to challenge hegemonic powers: “My work is only half done. A few women were saved when I mobilized my voice against one murderer a long time ago. What about all those killers in your own time? Who’s going to tell stories to postpone human demise?” (38). Arab women writers have adopted Shahrazad’s legacy of intelligent resistance, manipulating the power of words to undermine gender assumptions that deemed Arab women as unqualified and lacking agency. Their writings have become a tool for resisting the on-going processes of submission, killing, and violence that result from imperial and colonial schemes of hegemonic powers that made “murder [to be] on the loose, mapping with blood the entire world” (38).

Dulaimi shows that Shahrazad’s struggle to disrupt distorted representations of herself and of Arab women in general is on-going. The man in the short story is never able to see beyond the physicality of her appearance: “eyesight continues to master [his] faculties, rather than insight, intuition, or the imagination” (38). His perception of her does not extend the boundaries of exoticism, lust, and infatuation with her physical beauty. He never recognizes her real identity and never succeeds in seeing her real face. His knowledge of her, like colonial and patriarchal knowledge of Arab/Iraqi women, is limited and incomplete: “No one asked me who I was or what I wanted. What got them were the masks, not my fragile humanity, anguish, deprivations, or fears. You haven’t asked me why I have come, and all you ask for is to see my face” (380). She rejects his pleas to unveil her face and denounces the reductionist perceptions which dismiss her the agency in favor of her sexuality. By remaining veiled, she asserts herself

as a speaking agent rather than an object of lust. Shahrazad finds no use in conversing with the man, who focuses only on her “feminine beauty” (39). Expressing her tiredness of men’s reductionist perceptions of her, she leaves him, and her ethereal golden body vanishes in front of him.

In Cisneros’ short story “Never Marry a Mexican,” the archetype of La Malinche, the whore and the violated woman is disrupted, and the story gives a new perspective of Chicana subjectivity. The sexist perception of this historical figure turned her into an archetype connoting negative descriptions of Chicanas, reducing them to passive sexual objects and traitors. Cisneros’ depiction of Malinche in her short story challenges the hegemonic gendered perception of Chicanas’ subjectivity and socio-political construction of their identity. Clemencia, the narrator, is a Chicana woman whose identity and subjectivity are shaped according to the gendered and racialized perceptions of women’s roles in her culture. Like Malinche, who lived in different cultures, the Indian and the Spanish, Clemencia lives in between two cultures: the Mexican and the American. Both are translators, and they mediate communication between two cultures. Clemencia’s Mexican American mother warns her to never marry a Mexican in order to save her daughter from what she suffered as a result of marrying a Mexican man. Clemencia’s father and his family considered Clemencia’s mother as an outsider because she was born in the U.S. and did not belong to the upper-middle-class. Clemencia’s mother suffered from intersectional forms of discrimination and oppression: class, gender, and ethnicity. As a result, she defies the prescribed gendered and racialized roles, and she chooses to marry a white man and instills the mantra, “never marry a Mexican,” in her daughter. Laura Paz states, “Clemencia’s mother has in fact had a psychological effect on her notion of Mexican men, and hence the Mexican culture. This advice to “never marry a Mexican” becomes complicated because it causes Clemencia to

loathe Mexicans, white women (for not being Mexican), and ultimately herself for the Mexican blood that runs through her” (22). The mother’s advice distorts Clemencia’s perception of gender relations and leads her to resent both the American culture and the Mexican. Clemencia chooses to never marry any man and instead finds both joy and revenge in having relationships with white married men.

The mother figure is one of the links that connects this story to the story of Malinche, whose mother sold her into slavery. Clemencia describes her mother as selfish and “too busy worrying about her own life, she would’ve sold us to the Devil if she could” (73). Clemencia is resentful of her self-centered mother who cheated on her father, while he was dying in the hospital, and married the white man with whom she had the affair:

Once Daddy was gone, it was like my ma didn’t exist, like if she died, too...like if something already dead dried up and fell off, and I stopped missing where she used to be. Like if I never had a mother. And I’m not ashamed to say it either. When she married that white man, and he and his boys moved into my father’s house, it was as if she stopped being my mother. Like I never even had one. (73)

Laura Paz finds this line of the story relevant to the story of La Malinche. Clemencia’s mother abandons her and her sister and lets the white man and his sons occupy her father’s house. Similarly, Malinche’s mother abandoned her daughter and sold her into slavery to leave the space for the new husband’s son to win the throne instead of Malinche (21). Clemencia and her sister are betrayed by their mother, who becomes submissive to her white husband and his son. The mother cannot defend her daughters, and they are ousted from their home. The mother’s words and actions deeply affect Clemencia’s life, and she unconsciously adopts them. The mother implanted in her daughter the perception of her inferiority, warning her to never marry from her own people. She seeks revenge through dating unavailable white men and rejects the idea of marriage with men altogether, viewing the institution as patriarchal enslavement and a source of inevitable disappointment:

So, no. I never married and will never will. Not because I couldn't, but because I'm too romantic for marriage. Marriage has failed me, you could say. Not a man exists who hasn't disappointed me, whom I could trust to love the way I've loved. It's because I believe too much in marriage that I don't. Better to not marry than live a lie. (69)

Witnessing men's infidelities and their tendencies to suppress women, Clemencia resents the idea of marriage and chooses to live free from this oppressive institution. She chooses to be the mistress and have affairs with many men, finding joy in demolishing rigid gender roles: "Just the sweet part of the fruit, without the bitter skin that daily living with a spouse can rend" (69).

The connection to the story of La Malinche is made explicit right after Clemencia finishes talking about her family as she recalls her affair with her white lover, her art teacher, Drew, who used to call her his Malinalli: "It was a joke, a private game between us, because you looked like a Cortéz with that beard of yours. My skin dark against yours" (74). She loved him deeply, but he used her as a sexual object. Thus, she decides to revenge by seducing his son who is now her art student in high school. This modern Malinche refuses to submit to this modern Cortéz, and she acts like the invader who dominates the life of her lover. Cisneros reverses the negative stereotype of La Malinche, or as Octavio Paz describes her "the Chingada," into an active and aggressive agent who uses sexuality as a powerful means of defying gendered archetypes. Clemencia is depicted not as the penetrated one but as the one in control of her affair with Drew. In a reversal of stereotypes, rather than playing the victim of male desire, she speaks arrogantly of her control over his life and her involvement in the birth of his son (having slept with Drew at the night his son was born): "You're nothing without me. I created you from spit and red dust. And I can snuff you between my fingers and thumb if I want to... You're just a smudge of paint I chose to birth on canvas. And when I made you over, you were no longer a part of her, you were all mine" (75). The way she addresses him shows that she considers him an inferior and that she has the power to control him. She becomes the victimizer and thinks that she

can subvert the racialized and gendered hierarchy by sexually controlling her lover, claiming control over his life. She rejects passive subjectivity, passive sexuality, and traditional gender roles. Following the methods of the oppressor, she becomes the invader and invades his life and his body (the same way Cortéz invaded Malinche's life and body). Her sexual affair with him foregrounds her aggressiveness and her change of imposed gender positionalities:

You're not a man without your clothes...You're so much a child in my bed. Nothing but a big boy who needs to be held...When we forgot ourselves, you tugged me, I leap inside you and split you like an apple. Opened for the other to look and not give back...You were ashamed to be so naked. Pulled back. But I saw you for what you are, when you opened yourself for me...I didn't sleep. I was taking you in that time. (78-9)

In a reversal of male language used to depict the sexual possession of women, this paragraph shows that Clemencia is the one penetrating and controlling Drew. However, her domination is also distinctly maternal. She does not treat him according to the prescribed gender hierarchy where he is the dominant man; she describes him as a powerless child who needs her and depends on her.

After eighteen years of her affair with Drew, she continues her revenge by having an affair with his son: "I sleep with this boy, their son. To make the boy love me the way I love his father. To make him want me, hunger...Come here, *mi carinito*. Come to mamita...I can tell from the way he looks at me. I have him in my power" (82). The fusion of maternal and sexual desire frees Clemencia from the patriarchal perception of pure motherhood and the asexual mother. She claims that she is Drew's son's pseudo-mother: "Your son. Does he know how much I had to do with his birth? I was the one who convinced you to let him be born. Did you tell him, while his mother lay on her back laboring his birth, I lay in his mother's bed making love to you" (74-5). She perceives her sexual intercourse with Drew as parallel to the birth process. For her, maternity can be achieved without being confined within marriage and patriarchal domination. She violates the patriarchal perception that motherhood should be

achieved through biological bondage: “And it’s not the last time I’ve slept with a man the night his wife is birthing a baby...It’s always given me a bit of crazy joy to be able to kill those women like that, without their knowing it. To know I’ve had their husbands when they were anchored in blue hospital rooms, their guts yanked inside out, the baby sucking their breasts while their husband sucked mine” (76-7). She challenges fixed patriarchal ideologies of maternity and mocks the concept of biological motherhood imposed on women to control and oppress them. She shows that motherhood can be achieved without submission to the patriarchal ideologies that confine women within the boundaries of the domestic sphere.

The story critiques, through Clemencia’s crude actions and choices, the racialized marginalization of the Chicanas in the U.S. She knows that Drew will never marry her because she is a Mexican and is perceived in his culture as inferior: “he could never marry me...No, of course not. I see. I see” (80). She intentionally leaves traces of her at his house to take revenge on him and his white wife for his racism and ethnocentrism. This racialized dichotomous prejudice is the core of Clemencia’s problem; she has internalized the inferior perception of her origins and considers all Mexicans as inferior, and she does not consider the white wife an ally: “If she was a brown woman like me, I might’ve had a harder time living with myself, but since she is not, I don’t care...She’s not my sister” (76). Clemencia is a complex character; she avoids the stigmatized area of the victimized passive daughters of La Malinche by adopting the tools of the victimizer. She admits that she has been “accomplice, committed premeditated crimes. [She is] guilty of having caused deliberate pain to other women. [She is] vindictive and cruel, and [she is] capable of everything” (69). The idea of betrayal echoes that of La Malinche, who was stigmatized for betraying her race. Clemencia betrays other women and her betrayal of the “sisterhood” of other women is based on racialized prejudice.

Like Malinche, Clemencia is the victim of intersectional oppression; her subjectivity and identity are defined by her race and her gender. Despite her unethical responses to the hierarchical and intersectional oppression she has faced, her actions break down the dominant social ideologies which permit men's infidelities and condemn Chicanas' sexual indiscretions: "I've known men too intimately. I've witnessed their infidelities, and I've helped them to it" (68). Thus, Cisneros deconstructs the archetypal representation of the "whore" and the willingly passive woman by showing that women are not the only participant to be blamed for infidelity. Laura Paz comments on this issue in the story: "When women and men engage in infidelity, it is typically the woman that gets the label of promiscuity, and Cisneros criticizes her society for that. Also, Cisneros questions what is wrong with a woman who enjoys her sexuality, and why does she have to be stigmatized for embracing it" (21). The story presents an oppositional consciousness that rejects the stigmatization of Chicana women for embracing their sexuality, refusing to see women as "La Chingada" or as "bad women" and "traitors" to the race.

Clemencia finds herself confined within rigid gender roles that detrimentally define her identity. These gender roles are heavily affected by the long history of Indigenous identity distortion and mythmaking that resulted in limiting Chicanas' roles and identities. Chicana writers seek to subvert these rigid hegemonic roles, imposed by patriarchal and colonial ideologies, and present alternative discourses. Cisneros does not present a straightforward idea of subversion in her short story. Jean Wyatt states that the story "complicates the notion of subverting feminine gender roles by borrowing from masculinity: in reaction to the passive sexuality ascribed to La Malinche, Clemencia adopts the aggressive, violent sexual stance of the "chignon," but the tactic fails to release her from the influence of the Malinche legend" (245). Clemencia defines herself against the hegemonic depiction of Malinche as the passively

exploited slave, yet she never escapes the hierarchical framework of the legend. However, Clemencia, being the narrator of the story, presents a counter narrative of Malinche, and she becomes the center of discourse rather than being the object of a one-sided dominant narrative.

The reimaging and representation of Shahrazad and La Malinche in the selected short stories subvert and challenge the distorted figuration of these two female figures in hegemonic discourses. Dominant Eurocentric discourses mythologized the legacy of Shahrazad and Malinche and turned them into archetypes of the passive violated woman or the seductive woman. Dulaimi and Cisneros present a counter discourse that undermines those hegemonic reductionist representations of Arab and Chicana female icons and opens the door for new subjectivities and identity structures. These new representations set the stage for enacting challenging and subversive subjectivities that empower Arab and Chicana women. Dulaimi's revival of Shahrazad in the present time shows the on-going reductionist perception of Arab/Iraqi women in patriarchal and hegemonic discourses, a perception which is based on false constructions of these women's identities. The magical realist story questions the archetype of the sexualized passive Arab woman and proclaims her active subjectivity. Cisneros reinscribes the myth of La Malinche and the archetype of the passive violated woman. Clemencia finds in sexuality a powerful tool to violate the patriarchal and racial hegemonic systems. Cisneros's story reflects Chicanas' struggle with fixed assumptions imposed on them by patriarchal and colonial powers. Both stories present counter discourses that break the boundaries of hegemonic ideologies and go beyond the mythologized depictions of Arab and Chicana identities and present active examples of survival and resistance.

Chapter Four

Intuition, Healing, and Postcolonial Subjectivities

Historically, women and their struggles have been considered secondary to national and ethnic anti-colonial and anti-imperialist processes. Employing overtly male-focused rhetoric to emphasize the strength and rationality of their position, anti-colonial movements often excluded women. Maysalun Hadi and Ana Castillo present a counter-discourse that bespeaks a new understanding of women's role in Iraqi and Chicana women's identity formation. This counter-discourse is based on promoting postcolonial feminist visions that are marginalized in dominant patriarchal and colonial discourses, such as women's intuition and spirituality. In this chapter, analyzing Hadi's *Al- 'yūn al- Sūd* (*The Black Eyes* 2002) and Castillo's *So Far from God* (1993), I will follow Iraqi and Chicana women's struggle to develop their own postcolonial feminist consciousness that enacts challenging feminist subjectivities and avoids the reductionist representation of women as mere symbols of the protective Mother of the nation (Iraq) or the ethnicity (Chicana). In imperialist discourses, these women are stripped of agency and represented as a monolithic body of oppressed women that need to be saved, supplying imperialist ideology with justifications for imperialism. For the colonizer, such women are oppressed by their own men. On the other hand, for the patriarchal (ethno-) nationalists, women are categorized as the saviors and nurturers of the (ethno-) national identity; that is why they need to be saved and protected. Women's participation in national and political struggles breaks the mold of the passivity of women which strips them of any agency and keeps them as victims. I will demonstrate that Iraqi and Chicana women writers decolonize the dominant ideologies that represent them as mere national symbols. The selected novels present examples of active feminist subjectivities that play vital roles in resisting marginalization and political oppression.

These novels provide a counternarrative that challenges imperialist perception of Iraqi and Chicana women through valuing knowledge presented by everyday local women away from reductionist masculine knowledge paradigms and how these women use their knowledge to redress dominant perceptions of (ethno-)national identities.

Nira Yuval-Davis refers to the paradoxical ways gender relations and women are treated in theories of nationalism. On one hand, the homeland is perceived as the woman/mother for whom wars should be waged (to defend “the woman and the children”). However, women have been completely marginalized in most theories of nationalist political theories (9). Following the colonial model of patriarchal nationalism which ignores women and reduces their roles to the domestic space, most neocolonial nationalisms and ethno-nationalisms also locate women in the margins of the national discourse. Yuval-Davis maintains that:

Women usually have an ambivalent position within the collectivity. On the one hand...they often symbolize the collectivity unity, honor and the *raison d'etre* of specific national and ethnic projects, like going to war. On the other hand, however, they are often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic and retain an object rather than a subject position. In this sense the construction of womanhood has a property of Otherness. Strict cultural codes of what it is to be a 'proper woman' are often developed to keep women in this inferior power position. At the same time there is a close link between notions of sexuality and other forms of construction of 'otherness' such as racism. (19)

This ambivalent perception of women's role in national processes deprives them of active political roles. They are considered an “Other” that should be controlled due to the fact that both gender and nation are institutionalized concepts constructed for the benefit of the hegemonic powers.

Gender and nation are constructed notions based on ideologies of exclusion and marginalization. These concepts, as Natividad Gutierrez Chong suggests, are “modes of discourse” transmitted and perpetuated by social institutions (schools, the family, and the Church, for example) and social norms (340-1). As Chong argues, the “mode of discourse” of the

nation-building process fundamentally relies on existing gender categorization imbedded in the structures of power governing state and social institutions. It follows that the discourse of nation-building often excludes women or naturalizes existing gender divisions and restrictions.

However, while women's subjectivities are restricted in national discourses, they cannot be reduced to one-sided form. Women participate in the project of nation-building "as biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities, as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions on sexual and marital relations), as active transmitters and producers of the national culture, as symbolic signifiers of national difference, as active participants in national struggles" (Chong 341). While these options may be limiting, women can integrate, redefine, and reclaim these forms of subjectivity in national struggles. Their role is not restricted to the traditional ones assigned to them by dominant powers and discourses.

Nevertheless, colonial and neocolonial discourses tend to silence the vital roles women play in order to emphasize the strength and masculinity of the nation and glorify the more enterprising roles of men in political conflicts. For example, women in Iraq were not given the chance to demonstrate active national agencies in any of the political phases the country has undergone since the establishment of the Iraqi government in 1932. During the colonial period, the traditional roles established by British colonialism became part of the social construction of Iraqi gender roles: "In colonial Iraq, the formulation and context of the "woman question" were marked by both marginalization from power and the tribalization of most of the Iraqi society, which was ruled by tribal law in rural areas and by a Sunni elite in the cities" (Ali 73). The dual marginalization of Iraqi women restricted their participation in the political scene, and the traditional roles of women were emphasized as part of the social norms for decades after the end of colonialism. Moreover, women were represented as national symbols rather than anti-colonial

participants. Nadjé al- Ali describes how women were tasked by the regime of Saddam Hussein with bearing the symbolic agenda of the nation, representing a revived national honor and stamina, while also asked to physically bare the nation's future soldiers. In the post-Saddam era, women are again asked to bare a revised cultural agenda—this time representing rebellion against the secularism and Western cultural and political interference (741). The masculine political theories described by Nadjé al-Ali sideline women and their struggle for agency, restricting their importance to symbolic representations which emphasize male power and lock women within the boundaries of the private space. Iraqi women's roles were restricted to the domestic space, and, if they were allowed to enter the public space as workers, their entrance into the public was a temporary exception: they were given a secondary/compensatory role. During the Ba'ath regime period, Iraqi women were manipulated as a working force to compensate the scarcity in labor:

During the years of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) women's increased participation in the public sphere to replace male soldiers coincided with the further militarization of society and a glorification of certain types of masculinity, i.e., the fighter, the defender of his nation and the martyr. Women were simultaneously encouraged by the state to replace male workers and civil servants, who were fighting at the front, and to 'produce' more Iraqi citizens and future soldiers. The glorification of a militarized masculinity coincided with the glorification of the Iraqi mother. (745)

The importance of women's participation was enforced with patriarchal ideologies that kept them within the molds of national symbols. Iraqi women's situation worsened after 2003. After achieving noticeable progress on different institutional and bureaucratic scales, despite the repressive nature of the Ba'ath regime, Iraqi women's marginalization and silencing increased after the U.S. invasion: "women are prevented from leaving their houses by fear and a great sense of insecurity. Violent burglaries, mafia-like gangs that roam the cities at night, increased sexual violence, including rape, as well as militant resistance and US snipers have pushed women into the background" (al-Ali 743). The militarized nature of the Iraqi state led to

endowing power to men and emphasizing conservative and patriarchal oppression of Iraqi women, enclosing them in ideological representations that sideline their struggles and rights.

Chicana women also have suffered from ideological misrepresentation, and most of them have been confined within the boundaries of traditional patriarchal and colonial ideologies. Chicana have been marginalized by the American dominant culture. Since the annexation of the American Southwest in the 1800s by the American government, the Chicano/a community was marginalized socially, politically, and economically. They suffered from the dispossession of land, systemic racism/lynching, labor exploitation, strategic deportations of citizens and non-citizens, and segregation of ethnic Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest, particularly Texas. As a result, they have found refuge in creating an anti-imperialist community that has shared culture, language, and history, and shares the same incentives for establishing a resistant ethno-national identity. The 60's and 70's mark the emergence of *El Movimiento*, which is a civil rights movement aimed at Chicana community empowerment and embracing Chicana identity, rejecting assimilationist white American identity. Embracing values of the family and community was among the main goals of the movement to fight against western oppressive ideologies. Before the Movement, the term "Chicano" was often understood as derogatory. After the Movement, the terms "Chicana" and "Chicano" were used by many of those who believed in their hybrid identity as an indication of their ethnic solidarity and showing pride in their Indigenous descent: "The 1960s and 70s were times of outright oppression: signs read, "Mexicans and dogs not welcomed," while discrimination in housing, employment, education, and voting was rampant. Chicanas/os and their local community organizations operated largely on the outside of, and in opposition to, institutional systems and the dominant society" (Rios 55). Chicana/o community created a strong political and cultural presence in response to the

institutionalized discrimination and identity erasure and rejected the disenfranchisement they suffered by the American dominant culture.

The Movement often manifested as a male-centered construct that sidelined Chicana women's identity struggles and mostly excluded them from the political scene, restricting their roles to traditional female ones, such as nurturing children and domestic upkeep: "For Chicanos/as, there was a keen focus on the development of a distinct political identity. Its focus, however, was limited: identity was centered in race and ethnicity with strong male overtones. Women played a critical role within the *movimiento*, however, their role was marginalized in the pursuit of a broader Chicano identity" (Rios 55). The male-centered movement regarded Chicana feminists, who seek the acknowledgement of their intersectional marginalization, as traitors. Chicana feminists' push for women's liberation fundamentally deviated from the rhetoric of the movement, which glorified traditional visions of Chicano culture and family. Chicano loyalists thought that fighting racism should be addressed prior to addressing other issues, such as sexism. Women were misrepresented politically, economically, and socially and were often not allowed to address their marginalization within the movement. The more they acted independently, the more they were seen as "bad women" for disrupting the traditional roles of male and female in mainstream Chicano culture and for supposedly embracing the Anglo women's ideologies. Alicia Gaspar de Alba echoes these observations and refers to the chauvinism of the early Chicano Movement. The *feministas* who wanted to have more active roles were perceived as "men-haters and 'agringadas' and sellouts because, in seeking equality with men and personal liberation for themselves as women, they were accused of putting the individual before the culture. Rather than working toward cultural nationalism and the empowerment of the Raza brotherhood, they were said to be polluting the movement from within and splitting up the

Chicano Holy (not to mention heterosexual) Familia” (70). Therefore, most Chicana women were more silenced and enclosed within the traditional roles that they had to adopt within the boundaries of the family and the society in general.

According to Cherrie Moraga, the patriarchal nature of the Chicano male-dominated Movement is due to the emasculation of Chicano men by Anglo-American imperialist ideologies. Notions of American nationalism were built on the disenfranchisement and systemic exclusion of Mexican Americans as a group (like Native Americans and African Americans). Chicano ethno-nationalism was a response, in part, to that abject position of collectively being “Others.” The desire to reassert Chicano masculine potency enticed *El Movimiento* loyalists to embrace a patriarchal manifestation of Mexican heritage (230). Moraga maintains that “Chicanos are an occupied nation within a nation” in which women’s roles are restricted to being nurturing mothers, sexual partners and fighters for the biggest cause of the movement, which gives the Chicano man the traditional role of the dominant father who controls women’s private and public life (231). The biggest cause of the movement was rejecting the social, economic, and political oppression that Chicano have undergone because of the oppressive Anglo-American policies against Mexican Americans. One of the prominent concepts that *El Movimiento* embraced to show resistance to the Anglo-American oppression is the concept of the family, which was used to safeguard and promote the value of loyalty to the Chicano family/community. However, the Chicano movement’s perception of the family was sexist and emphasized Chicana’s gender oppression.

Iraqi women and Chicanas share a common context of marginality and struggle against imperialist and colonial structures which led to intensifying the sexist and patriarchal confines that have limited their roles and misrepresented their subjectivities. U.S. imperialist structures

have circumscribed Chicanas and Iraqi women's identities within fixed constructs that have marginalized and silenced them and led to the deterioration of their status quo. U.S. exploitative imperialist structures have frozen Chicanas and Iraqi women in time and space, making their day-to-day life and subjectivities invisible. On the other hand, Iraqi and Chicano anti-imperialist structures have used oppressive gender paradigms to emphasize traditional sexist configurations and fight American and European values. Iraqi and Chicano anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist movements considered feminist agendas as secondary and reduced women's roles to symbolic subjectivities. In response to this marginalization, Iraqi and Chicana women writers challenge the restricted roles given to women in the struggle for national identity. Re-exploring and re-presenting female archetypes that constituted a crucial part of the Indigenous organic history and tradition, these writers construct a feminist postcolonial consciousness that regards what is considered feminine and inferior in dominant discourses to be a crucial element in the feminist struggle for agency. The novels of Maysalun Hadi and Ana Castillo present women's intuition and spirituality as an oppositional consciousness that challenges patriarchal (ethno-) nationalism and its one-sided masculine rationality through the re-engagement of the Zarqa-like (intuitive) and *curandera* (spiritual healer) subjectivities. They present communities of women who transform their experiences with subjugation into forms of resistance and celebrate active feminist subjectivities that steer the fixed ideology of patriarchal nationalism towards an inclusive and integrative strategy that makes use of feminine attributes. In this chapter, I shall attempt to inquire into the reconstruction of new subjectivities—the Zarqa-like and the *curandera* subjectivities—in Hadi's and Castillo's novels and investigate how these novels provide oppositional consciousness to hegemonic ideologies that exclude women from the political sphere. The Zarqa-like subjectivity embodies attributes, such as intuition and clairvoyance, and

has the ability of future prediction. The Zarqa-like subjectivity works as a cautionary and protective agent. Similarly, the aspect of the protective agent can also be found in the *curandera* subjectivity which has the power of spiritual healing using herbal and natural ingredients and following traditional approaches of healing. My perception of these two subjectivities is based on the legacy of two prominent female figures: Zarqa al-Yamama (in Iraqi/Arab culture) and the *curandera* (in Mexican American culture).

Zarqa and the *curandera* both have certain kinds of power that they employ to protect their community. Zarqa has the power of seeing across long distances and predict the danger that awaits her tribe. Her unique ability has been mentioned in Arabic proverbs and literature as a reference to the one who has keen insight. In the adab anthology *al- 'Iqd al-farīd* by Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi al-Andalusi, she is mentioned in the section of proverbial women: “‘*absar min Zarqa' al -yamama*”, which is a proverb that means “more far-sighted than Zarqa al- Yamama.” It is used to refer to people who have strong foresight (71-2). Moreover, the pre-Islamic poet, al- Nābigha al-Thubyāni, refers to her in his poetry as *fatātu al- hay* “the girl of the neighborhood” who is famous of her keen insight as a reminder to take into consideration women’s precision and wisdom (al- Shantamry 161-2).

In modern Arab literature, the story of Zarqa provides rich imageries, meanings, and comparisons with political events in the Arab world. It has been utilized by Arab writers to convey their fears and their intuitive insights concerning what they believe will happen in the future of Arab nations. Zarqa is a semi-legendary pagan Arab woman whose tribesmen ignored her clairvoyance to their own detriment. She was a blue-eyed Najdi woman from a town in central Arabia with supernaturally good eyesight that allowed her to see great distances. In one of the wars involving her tribe, the Jadis, she warned her people of the advent of the enemy, but

this time they did not believe her. Knowing of Zarqa's penetrating eyesight, the attacking tribe hid behind trees that they carried as camouflage to prevent Zarqa from warning her people. She saw the trees moving in their direction and notified her tribe that trees were approaching, but they did not pay attention to her warnings, thinking that she was raving (Khoury 312-3). Consequently, they were massacred, and her eyes were plucked out by the enemy soldiers. She was then crucified. Zarqa's tribe was annihilated because they neglected Zarqa's keen insight and intuition.

Zarqa's story underscores the acuity of women's intuition and senses and their ability to predict danger before it happens. This story has been part of the Arabic folklore canon for centuries. However, in the latter half of the twentieth century the legacy of Zarqa has been employed with vigor by Arab writers. Palestinian poet Izz al-Dīn al-Manāsrā's 1966 poem "Zarqa al-Yamama" predicts the danger of the Zionist occupation and the looming defeat of the Palestinian Arabs. The poet employs the symbolism and structure of the legendary story and connects the past to the present in order to criticize the state of Arab countries and the ineffectiveness of Arab leaders (Musa 210). Following this, the Egyptian poet Amal Dunqul wrote his poem entitled "Al- Buka'a bayn yadi Zarqa al-Yamama" ("Crying in the Arms of Zarqa al-Yamama") in 1969. In this poem, he addresses Zarqa in the voice of a defeated soldier who channels Arabs' feelings regarding the aftermath of the 1967 war between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. He uses the figure of Zarqa to affirm his adherence to his Arab identity and mourn the great losses that Arabs suffered in the Naksa because of the Arab leaders' disregard for the effects of the war on their people. These poets revive the legacy of Zarqa to articulate their fears, foresight, and concerns about national issues and the consequences of ignoring imminent threats from colonial powers. In the short story by Salwa Bakr, "International Women's Day," we find an

allusion to the legacy of Zarqa as a symbol of cautionary truth and power of women's insight (Cohen-Mor 194). In a scathing, ironic style, Salwa Bakr critiques the marginalization of women in Egyptian society and the dominant patriarchal apparatus, itself a replica of the colonial power structure that restricts the role of Arab women to the domestic and private sphere. The authoritative male teacher, who is supposed to celebrate the significant role of women in society on International Women's Day and teach his pupils to value and appreciate women, seems unable to observe his own teachings. His ignorance of Zarqa al-Yamama in the celebratory speech symbolizes public neglect of women's vision in the ongoing struggle toward progress and equality. In her poem, "Which Direction are the Trees?" Saudi poet Thuraya al-'Urayyid shows a profound identification with Arab issues and a strong intuitive ability to predict the fearful future awaiting Arabs as a result of the political unrest in the region. Intertextuality is the technique that al-'Urayyid uses in her poem. She presents her inquiry in the title of the poem, questioning which direction the danger is lurking by connecting the past (Zarqa's story) to the present (the poem) in order to predict the future. Thuraya al-'Urayyid's poem is an example of Arab women's penetrating insights, their ability to discern imminent threats to the Arab communities, and their commitment to the survival of the Arab people. The employment of the trope of Zarqa by Arab women writers also serves as another example of Arab women articulating and transcribing history, which here includes the future as well as the present and past. In "Which Direction are the Trees?" al-'Urayyid evokes Zarqa al Yamama and addresses her with a melancholic poetical voice that reflects the poet's own personal and political fears. The female subject of the poem expresses concern about the nation's fractured state and the dispersion of its people and calls for an embrace of Zarqa's heritage as a response to the danger surrounding her people and her nation. The poem evokes the myth of a clairvoyant woman to

create an oppositional consciousness that changes the positionality of the colonized female subject and steers attention toward female insight, demanding that women's voices be taken seriously by male Arab leaders. Yet like Zarqa, whose efforts to warn her people were dismissed as the ravings of a madwoman, the poet's pleas also fall on deaf ears.

Arab women utilize the heritage of Zarqa as an example of the intuitive woman who uses her power to protect her community. Likewise, Chicana writers use the *curandera*—the woman whose healing power protects her community. In order to find oppositional representations of Chicana subjectivity, Chicanas return to their Indigenous history and culture. *Curanderismo* is one of these ways in which these feminist writers challenge hegemonic representations of Chicana women. *Curanderismo* is a healing system that blends different spiritual and traditional methods to cure people physically, psychologically, and spiritually. *Curanderas* are significant agents in Chicana resistance and survival literature because they symbolize Chicanas' resilience and ability to heal the illness and trauma of colonization and the wounds of identity erasure, racial violence, and gender discrimination. The traumas and post-colonial wounds that Mexican Americans suffered from go deep in history to the time when the Catholic Church, brought by the Spanish settlers, marginalized and silenced the Aztecs' Indigenous culture and Nahua knowledge through genocide. Ideologies of exclusion and racial discrimination were renewed and intensified with the Anglo-American annexation of the American Southwest (1845- 1855) and the atrocious vestiges of losing the ancestral land and culture, which still inflict Mexican Americans in the present day. Amanda Ellis states in her book, *Letras y Limpias*, that “more than a flat, static stereotype, curanderas in print... offer us insight into a healing framework which can be leveraged to address the caustic vestiges of modernity/coloniality in the present day” (8). She contends that curanderas' healing rituals provide a “decolonial bioethical framework” (9)

performed by everyday women to provide a radical set of knowledge that challenges capitalist systems of wellness and health and contemporary biomedical practices. Ana Castillo states that: “The history of *Curanderismo* derives from ancient knowledge that spans all five continents. The methods of curanderismo, which apply the use of mental, spiritual, and material expertise, descend from Native American, European, Eastern, and Middle East philosophies and knowledge” (Castillo 115). *Curanderas* are gifted women known in the Chicana/Latina communities for their healing powers, practiced in the form of herbal and massage treatment as well as Christian symbolism and spirituality. According to Ana Castillo, the *curandera* is “a specialized healer learned in the knowledge of specifically healing the body and is not necessarily a psychic” (155), but the treatment can be used to heal the psyche since the non-western practice considers the ailing body as a whole and does not separate the psyche from the body (115). She emphasizes the importance of reclaiming the marginalized knowledge of Indigenous women that has been erased by the dominant masculine ideologies (Anglo-American and Chicano patriarchy) and utilizing it to face the different obstacles Chicanas encounter in their struggle to achieve their fulfilled humanity (117). Chicana feminists construct their own discourse that integrates Indigenous practices and Christian spirituality and thereby reconstruct their situation from that of victims to survivors through reappropriating the knowledge of maternal ancestors. The *curandera* is reappropriated and reclaimed by Chicana writers to rewrite a history that allows women’s agency and empowerment on different scales. This reappropriation can be understood as a counternarrative that decolonizes the power of toxic masculinity and emphasizes the significant role those everyday female healers can play in the collective communal well-being through providing a traditional medicinal system of holistic care. *Curandera*’s hybrid identity, derived from the hybrid practices she enacts, resembles the

hybrid identity of Chicana women. Moreover, she is aligned with Chicana *feministas* through the emphasis on her agency and acute intuitive skills in selecting practices and herbs necessary for the benefit of her community. The *curandera* character features in many Chicana/o literary works, such as Rudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless me, Ultima* (1971), in which Ultima, the mysterious healer, mentors the child-protagonist, Antonio, in his journey to maturity and uses her knowledge of herbal medicine and magic to cure people in her community. The *curandera* is also utilized by Monica Brown in her children's novel *Clara and the Curandera* (2011). Here, the *curandera* mentors and instructs a female child. Clara learns to be selfless, and she becomes aware of the importance of family and education through the instructions of the *curandera*. Gloria Anzaldúa also uses the figure of the *curandera* in her book *Friends from the Other Side* (1993), a bilingual book for children. In this story, the *curandera* helps protect the child protagonist, Prietita, and her friend Joaquin, who has immigrated unauthorized from Mexico to the U.S., from the Border Patrol agents by hiding the children in her house, which represents a space of spirituality and healing in resistance to governmental dominance. The *curandera* legacy is utilized by Chicana/o writers to acknowledge the importance of Indigenous cultural heritage and maternal medicinal practices to defy dominant discourses of neopatriarchal, ethno-national identity formations, and Anglo- American cultural and political hegemony and to heal cultural and spiritual wounds of colonialism and U.S. imperialism.

Zarqa and the *curandera* each represent 'ways of knowing' that constitute an oppositional consciousness and a counternarrative to imperialist paradigms of knowledge. I draw on Foucault to better understand how knowledge is produced and the relationship between knowledge and power. Foucault thinks that truth and knowledge are produced within a network of power relations. He argues that knowledge produced in certain political circumstances is imbued with

power which marginalizes those who are outside this circle of power. He says, “truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces, and which extends it” (133). In hegemonic regimes of truth, the privileged knowledges and ways of knowing are colonial and patriarchal and finds in male objective rationality a superior method of knowing to the exclusion of female intuitions and spirituality. Hegemonic binarism devalues this form of knowledge as passive, private, and feminine. These cultural features that must be silenced to leave the space for hegemonic rational ways of knowing, which in most cases requires violence to be applied. Iraqi and Chicana writers undermine this hegemonic ideology, reorienting intuition and spirituality as a useful feminist tool. In Hadi and Castillo’s novels, I explore how intuitive and spiritual knowledge are utilized and integrated by Yamama, the protagonist of *The Black Eyes*, and Dona Felicia, the healer in *So Far from God*. *The Black Eyes* centers around Yamama, a painter who sells her paintings to survive the economic hardships and the aftermath of the first Gulf War. Through Yamama’s eyes, the reader follows the misery and degradation that the people in her community undergo as a result of long years of war and sanctions. In *So Far from God*, Sofia and her four daughters: Esperanza, Caridad, Fe, and La Loca, live in a small town in the American Southwest. They face racial and gendered discrimination, and each one of them presents a different aspect of the ideological and institutionalized oppression Chicana women undergo as a result of the Anglo-American political and cultural domination. Hadi and Castillo portray characters that enact and utilize intuitive and spiritual powers to protect their communities, develop non-violent national agency, and provoke feminist resistance. Yamama in *The Black Eyes* and Dona Felicia in *So Far from God* represent embodied feminist oppositional consciousness that releases women from the limited dichotomous roles imposed by dominant hierarchies and enacts feminist active

subjectivities that work for the communal good. Yamama, whose name is a direct reference to Zarqa al- Yamama, has a Zarqa-like power of predicting the potential danger awaiting her community and her country from imperialist ideologies that control marginalized people and destroy their lives and cultures. Dona Felicia utilizes her knowledge of herbal medicine and spirituality to heal her people of the spiritual and psychological ailments resulting from the marginalization of her culture by U.S. imperialist and racial policies. Both Yamama and Dona Felicia are complex characters that exit the existential frame of women's passivity and reverse the Eurocentric celebration of male-centered knowledge, an ideology that sets women at the periphery of the mainstream knowledge and (ethno-) national discourses. Postcolonial feminist discourse encourages women to be more inclusive and participate in the betterment of national and ethno-national communities. Audre Lorde states that "it is necessary at all times to separate the needs of the oppressor from our own legitimate conflicts within our communities" (188). Yamama and Dona Felicia find new venues to acknowledge the conflicts and ailments of their communities away from the dominant and imperialist paradigms of knowledge that perceive women as inferior and unknowledgeable. Yamama's intuitive power and Dona Felicia's healing skills are strategies of self-empowerment that they use to defy imperialist ideologies that devalue local women's knowledge and agencies.

So Far from God (1993) depicts the struggle of a family living in the village of Tome, New Mexico. It presents Sofia and her four daughters: Esperanza, Fe, Caridad, and La Loca, who collectively represent a community of women facing patriarchal and imperialist oppression. The novel also portrays Dona Felicia as a devoted *curandera* who dedicates her healing powers to serving her community. She represents the Chicana healer whose knowledge is derived from Indigenous sources, Christian spirituality, and the environment around her. Her faith and

spiritual knowledge are “based not on an institution but on the bits and pieces of the souls and knowledge of the wise teachers that she met along the way” (Castillo 62). She learns the skills of *Curanderismo* from older *curanderas*, and her healing skills are supported by her strong religious devotion. She represents the epitome of Anzaldua’s mestiza identity³ characterized by “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity... [*La mestiza*] learns to juggle cultures” (101). Flexibility and inclusiveness are the main characteristics of the mestiza; she has to “shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (101). Dona Felicia shows flexibility and adopts an inclusive agency as she shifts from a “non-believer” to adopting a compromising positionality towards Christianity. She is a knowledgeable *curandera* who speaks three languages and has the role of a “devoted community servant” (61). This endeavor for whole perspectives releases her from the dichotomous categorization of dominant paradigms. Anzaldua maintains that having the mestiza consciousness enables mestizas to “break down the subject-object duality that keeps [them] a prisoner” (102) and have subjectivities that work in harmony with the environment and the community they live in as a strategy of survival. The subjectivity of the *curandera* that Dona Felicia enacts helps her break down the confines of the one-sided male-centered knowledge. Instead of being the object of the dominant perspectives of spirituality and religion, she becomes the generator of an inclusive paradigm of knowledge: Dona Felicia’s

³ The mestiza identity is the identity resulted from the colonial schemes and the conquest of the Europeans of the so-called the New World in the early sixteenth century. It is a bridge of different identities and different narratives. For more information, read Suzan Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p.18.

faith is a combination between Catholicism and Indigenous practices that she utilizes to serve her community. Castillo writes that Dona Felicia avoids adopting a one-sided perspective in her resistance to dominant ideologies but rather succeeds by “reaching a compromise with the religion of her people” (60). She makes use of both the dominant culture and the Indigenous one, and her knowledge is not based on a unitary aspect of scientific rationality but on plural paradigms of spiritual and healing practices, enacting a “plural personality” and operating in “a pluralistic mode” (Anzaldua 101) where everything is included and made use of. She mingles the different languages and cultures she has learned through her attentiveness to different sources of knowledge. The novel presents her as an example of Chicana ethno-national subjectivity through her ability to blend both colonial and Indigenous frameworks of knowledge in order to heal her community. Ylci Irizarry describes her as “Chicana history herself” and represents “the multilingualism and multiculturalism of Chicanas/os” (87-9) because she passed through all the experiences and events that most of the people of the American Southwest encountered from being born in Mexico to immigrating to the U.S. to repatriation during the Great Depression to going back to the U.S. and working as a *bracera* during World War II then being sent back to Mexico “in cattlecars along with the rest of the Mexicans who had been brought in as laborers during the days of prosperity” (Irizarry 87-8; Castillo 61).

Dona Felicia has a clear impact on Caridad, who is healed and learns the practice of healing from Dona Felicia. The latter teaches her *Curanderismo* and heals Caridad from the physical and spiritual ailments she has been suffering from as a result of patriarchal and colonial oppression. Felicia’s mentoring releases Caridad from the constraints of passivity and exploitation. Before accompanying Felicia, Caridad suffers from emotional instability due to a failed marriage and rejection by her husband, Memo. Her sadness drives her to a series of

unfulfilling sexual encounters which mark her as an object of sexual and bodily exploitation. Moreover, she gets viciously attacked one night by a mysterious “thing”, which the matter-of-fact omniscient narrative voice describes as “made of sharp metal and splintered wood of limestone, gold, and brittle parchment. It held the weight of a continent and was indelible as ink, centuries old and yet as strong as a wolf...it was pure force” (77). This mysterious force might represent the colonial power that has stripped Chicanas of their Indigenous identity and restricted their active subjectivities, leaving them without agency. Caridad finds in Felicia’s instructions and healing skills the remedy to her ailments, choosing to free herself from patriarchal and imperialist constraints and embrace a more inclusive and flexible world of spiritual adventures and inner reflection. The novel shows that Felicia’s healing power and knowledge, derived from Indigenous matriarchal heritage, is more effective than institutionalized scientific and religious practices. Her healing and intuitive knowledge is more integrative and non-static because she trusts her feelings and fingers (66), and her intuition directs her to the right remedy for each ailment. Felicia’s healing and intuitive powers represent the mestiza ethno-national identity that integrates different aspects of knowledge and enacts a flexible subjectivity that reclaims and maintains Indigenous heritage.

The struggle to keep the national identity from erasure and the endeavor to survive through feminist means are also among the main ideas tackled by Hadi in her novel *The Black Eyes*. The novel sheds light on the lived experiences of an Iraqi community (one of the Baghdadi neighborhoods), after the first Gulf War, a period when Iraqi people lived through post-war economic, political, and social hardships. The novel reflects the consequences of the war on a microcosmic community and gives an intuitive depiction of the future awaiting Iraqis through the eyes of Yamama, the protagonist, who watches how people in the neighborhood are affected

by war and sanctions. Yamama is a painter who leaves her job as a teacher and lives by selling her paintings. Using her Zarqa-like intuitive ability, she is able to predict the future of those people and the people of her country in general. Her fiancé, Hazim, leaves her and immigrates outside the country due to the very strict economic sanctions and the increasing impoverishment. She gets engaged to the mysterious former soldier, Muthanna, who looks like Hazim. Muthanna's mysteriousness and whimsicality give her intuitions of danger and anxiety, a situation which reflects the feelings of the people in the whole country watching news of the UN inspections of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and the possibility of launching war against the country. As previously stated, in times of war and during struggles for national identity, women often are not given the opportunity to play significant roles in the conflict other than as symbols of national identity and pride. Mona Fayad, in her article "Reinscribing Identity: Nation and Community in Arab Women's Writings," discusses Arab women's identity construction in relation to their nations and communities. She argues that writers such as Hamida Na'ana, Sahar Khalifa, Nawal al-Sa'adawi, Ghada al-Samman, and Hanan al-Shaykh have created an alternative discourse in which women no longer function as signifiers of interiority and traditionalism. This oppositional narrative breaks down the fixed role assigned to Arab women as "a historical metaphor buried deep within the foundations of the [national master] narrative" where women are homogenized as the "reservoir of a communal identity out of which the "imagined communities" of the nation, in Benedict Anderson's terms, can be constructed" (147). Fayad's argument rejects the reductionist discourse that strips Arab women of their agency and converts them to mere signifiers of nationalism. She states that "'interiority,' when presented as being synonymous with tradition and subsequently with Woman, is rejected as a foundation for any nationalist enterprise" (158). She stresses the importance of women's agency

in creating alternative national discourses. *The Black Eyes* follows an oppositional discourse that shows the protagonist as a creative intuitive woman who shows resistance even in the simplest ways. Al-Ali's study of women in Iraq gives us context for this novel's work; she asserts the idea of Iraqi women's resourcefulness and creativity, noting that Iraqi women are not "just passive victims" (758). Rather, al-Ali demonstrates that Iraqi women have, in many ways, been more successful at adapting to the changing social and economic situation than Iraqi men—scraping together informal businesses in ventures such as food catering and making use of diverse skills in crafting and recycling. Moreover, al-Ali points to Iraqi women's collaboration across ethnic, religious, and political divisions to lobby around vital national issues. Iraqi women followed different paths of survival during times of hardship. They played vital roles in public and private spheres, turning the private spheres into platforms of resistance and transforming the essentialist masculine representations of colonial and neo-colonial hegemony into a more inclusive and productive consciousness. The novel highlights Iraqi women's creativity and their survival strategies during the embargo years (1990-2003) through Yamama. Because working as a teacher does not provide her with enough financial aid, she uses her creativity and art skills as a means to survive. She works on her drawings at home and sells them to support herself as it was the case with most middle-class Iraqis during the embargo years when they left their governmental low wage jobs and opened their own businesses.

The productive and integrative consciousness can be found in Hadi's novel. Yamama feels the coming of the approaching disaster, for she has intuitive insight as the result of the trauma her community has endured. Yamama uses her drawing skills to document her intuitions and fears from the effects of war and sanctions on Iraqis. Moreover, her art becomes a feminist method of resisting the violence of war and the disastrous effects of sanctions on Iraqi people.

Al-Ali states that women such as Yamama lost many of their former outlets for expressing agency, for U.S. imperialist ideologies and policies, which have had an immense negative impact on the social and cultural fabric of the Iraqi society, also impacted Iraqi women's status quo. She contends that "without doubt Iraqi women have lost some of the achievements gained in the previous decades. They can no longer assert themselves through either education or waged employment, as both sectors have deteriorated rapidly" (747). Therefore, they have to find other alternatives that can help them to survive. Yamama chooses to leave her job and live by selling her paintings. Through Yamama's eyes, the reader is introduced to a community that suffers from the ramifications of the Iran-Iraq war, the first Gulf War and sanctions, and the upcoming Second Gulf War of 2003. Yamama sees the shock her neighbor, Jinān, gets after the return of Jinan's fiancé, Jamāl, after fifteen years of captivity in Iran's prisons. He returns a wrecked man looking much older than his real age. Yamama also watches Tahsīn, the local food distribution agent, who benefits from the economic hardships and cheats on the food portions he is supposed to distribute, and he does not give the buyers the whole food ration. The novel shows how the wars and sanctions have changed the Iraqi reality and the Iraqi people's life and personalities; they have changed from people who belong to the time of urbanity, education, and contentment—the time of Abdel al-Halīm (a famous Egyptian singer 1929-1977) and the time of *al- 'yūn al- sūd* (the black eyes), which resonates the song of Warda al-Jazairia (a famous Algerian singer 1939-2012)—to a people more anxious, more exotic and mysterious, and more materialistic. The novel's narrative is based on what Yamama sees happening in the neighborhood. We are introduced to Tahsīn, the molester and cheater who kills his late wife's daughter, Hayāt, the seductive woman, who does not submit to traditions and patriarchal social norms. We are also introduced to Muthanna, the former Iraqi soldier whose experience at war

turned him into a whimsical person; he looks like Yamama's fiancé, Hazim, but is more materialistic. Yamama's portrait, which she calls *a 'wad al-bukhūr* (incense sticks), presents the neighborhood people, the dead and the alive, waiting for the return of a dear one from war or captivity: "She draw all the people of the neighborhood with tall and slender bodies. They looked like incense sticks" (Hadi, translation mine 263). Yamama describes her purpose of the drawing by saying:

when someone looks at the painting after many years, they will see the alley people's black eyes as they yearn to see a loved one returning from war. This is the event that the painting reflects. If the spectator infers something else and heard the voices of the neighborhood people murmuring in their ears as if coming from a faraway universe. What they saw becomes harmonious with what they hear...the two frequencies match...then, the painting is completed. (Hadi, translation mine 264)

The painting voices the losses that occur at the time of war and reflects Yamama's intuition of the gruesomeness of war. The two faces that she draws clearly are those of Jamāl, the captive, and Hazim, the émigré. Jamāl is Jinān's fiancé, who comes back to Iraq after fifteen years of captivity in the Iranian prisons. His return disappoints Jinān, who had the intuition that he would come back one day, because he returns a changed man. The long years of absence and captivity have turned him into "a strange old man" with white hair and wrinkled face (Hadi 173). Between the two there is a time gap: she lived "a normal time and a normal life, while he lived outside of life and out of time" (translation mine 174). The novel shows the atrocious effects of war and captivation on Jamāl, who becomes a stranger and an outsider to his fiancé. He tries tragically to bridge that gap and fit in his new life. Jamāl and Jinān's story provides one strand of Yamama's intuition of the future of her people and country. The other strand is with Hazim, Yamama's fiancé, who leaves her and immigrates to the U.S. as a result of the drop in Iraq's economy, sanctions, and the political unrest after the first Gulf War. She dreams of him as her unborn baby

whom she aborts during the war (89) as a reference to the loss of Iraqi people who either immigrate or die due to the difficult political and economic situation of the country.

Another important intuitive representation that Yamama includes in her portrait is a high electric streetlight, an image that has significant symbolic meanings and has a connection to Hayāt. She claims that Hanwa, Tahsīn's wife, is her mother, and she decides to live in Tahsīn's house after her mother has passed away. The appearance of Hayāt, Tahsīn's stepdaughter, in the alley causes unrest, and a lot of rumors were woven around her and her scandalous relationships with Tahsīn and other men like Muthanna. After turning the alley upside down, the seductive woman suddenly disappears, and nothing is left of her except the palm of her hand. Tahsīn is suspected to be the killer. Looking at the little insects flying around the high light on the electricity pole near Hanwa's house, Yamama uses her intuitive skill and thinks that the blame should be placed on all the people of the alley:

Hayāt did not go to any one of the people of the alley; they hovered around her like vermin hovering around high light; they seduced her and mislead themselves with the spoils they can get from having a relationship with her. Was her advent to look for spoils a mistake? Or, was it the mistake of those who accepted her suspicious existence in the ally and her indwelling with a strange man in one house? Yamama did not see the mistake solely, but she foresaw who is the real mistaken. It is the vermin which still rolling around the high light installed on the electricity pole overlooking Hanwa's Garden. (Hadi, translation mine 251-2)

Yamama includes this image in her painting. This metaphorical image of the streetlight and the image of vermin rolling around it can be seen as an allusion to the events of the First Gulf War and the Ba'ath regime's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. It reflects Yamama's intuitive foresight, which enables her to see the real reason behind the political, economic, and social damage caused by war. The blame for all this damage is to be placed on the hegemonic political regime that was tempted by the spoils that could be gained with the invasion, like the vermin tempted by the high light and like the people of the ally tempted by Hayāt. Yamama foresees the traumatic

effects of political and economic hardships on the women in her community: “sanctions and war have led to massive impoverishment and insecurity, which have subjected women of various social backgrounds to considerable material strain” (al-Ali 746). Hayāt’s struggle is intersectional; she suffers from economic insecurities and hardships caused by U.S. imperialist policies, and she is oppressed by the patriarchal society that considers her a threat. In the end, she is killed because she is an outsider that does not belong to that patriarchal society. Yamama’s intuitive knowledge counters the objective rational knowledge of U.S. imperialism and national patriarchy, both based on violence and destruction, and she registers her apprehensions through art to raise awareness of the destructive effects of war on her community. Using her painting skills to document what she sees from the window of her studio and voice her warning about her people’s future, she erases the boundary between male objective rationality and female intuitive knowledge, making space for what is considered feminine and private to reflect agency.

In this chapter, I attempted to illustrate how Iraqi and Chicana women writers create an oppositional consciousness and a counternarrative to the dominant ideologies of colonialism and national patriarchy by reclaiming Indigenous female figures. Zarqa al-Yamama and the *curandera* have a strong connection to the Indigenous history of Arabs and Chicanx. The utilization of these figures in Iraqi and Chicana literature defies the violent, one-sided masculine rationality of the imperialist hegemonic powers, instead promoting peaceful, feminist, and integrative methods of resistance, such as female spirituality and intuition. In *So Far from God*, Ana Castillo evokes the heritage of the *curandera*, the healer, who represents the Chicana ethno-national identity and mestiza consciousness, blending cultures and erasing dichotomous representations of Chicana women that keep them in the margin. The *curandera* uses her healing skills and intuitive spirituality to protect her community from the ailments of colonial and

patriarchal powers. Similarly, in *The Black Eyes*, Maysalun Hadi depicts the protective female figure who has Zarqa-like traits and uses her intuitive power to protect her people and warn them of the consequences of war and economic hardship. Art and painting are the feminist method utilized in the novel to reflect an oppositional consciousness that breaks down imperialist and patriarchal ideologies which reduce women's roles to mere national symbols. Intuition is an active process of connecting inner life and knowledge with outer realities and experiences. In patriarchal nationalist discourse, masculine rationality devalues women's national intuitive ability, and sees no connection between women's inner feelings and intuition and the struggle for national identity. With the increase in violence in the world and the hegemonic methods used by states apparatuses to oppress "the Other," it is better to reclaim more peaceful and more integrative methods at times of conflict. The counternarrative presented in the selected novels values knowledge provided by everyday women and suggests the need to return to decolonial methods of resistance, such as women's intuition and female-centered medicinal healing. Castillo and Hadi's novels represent the broader work of Iraqi and Chicana feminists to offer models of feminist non-violent resistance opposed to the dominant rhetoric of masculine violence in their country's patriarchal nationalist movements. Iraqi and Chicana women writers present new subjectivities that enact strategic feminist methods to voice Iraqi and Chicana women's struggles for survival away from the violence of wars and colonialism.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This project is on the archetypal representations of Chicana and Iraqi women in postcolonial Iraqi and Chicana novels and short stories. Imperialist and hegemonic ideologies confine women's subjectivities within certain boundaries that other them and limit their positionalities. In colonial/imperialist discourses, colonized women are often categorized within certain archetypal representations, such as the melancholic, the ignorant, and the passive or seductress. I have examined these archetypal representations in a number of contemporary Iraqi and Chicana novels and short stories using postcolonialism and feminist postcolonialism as my overarching framework. I have employed these theoretical frameworks to examine the discourse on the reductionist representation of women in the Chicana and Iraqi narratives. The initial assumption of this study is that the selected texts present a counternarrative to reductionist mainstream masculine narratives that silence everyday active experiences and subjectivities of Iraqi women and Chicanas. Through the reimagining and the resurrection of female iconic figures in Iraqi's and Chicana's history and culture, the selected texts provide new subjectivities that voice the resistant positionality of the women in these texts. The counternarrative in these texts show Iraqi women and Chicanas as knowledgeable and protectors, productive, and surviving.

What links Iraqi and Chicana women is a common context of marginalization and struggles against dominant imperialist structures and discourses. These structures and discourses have a long tradition of silencing and underrepresenting such entities, which Chandra Mohanty calls "imagined communities of oppositional struggles." She finds new understanding and reconceptualization to agencies, histories, and consciousnesses of the so called "third world women" and create new alliances among them through investigating how intersecting oppressive

paradigms, such as color, gender, class, and nation, define and circumscribe these women's experiences and lives. She contends that what connects women's communities, such as Iraqi women and Chicanas, is that they represent "imagined communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic" (4). Following this framework of Mohanty of exploring the significations of the commonality of struggles and resistance among marginalized women, I chose two different communities of women that share a common context of resistance and struggles due to oppressive imperialist structures and ideologies. Iraqi and Chicana women narratives provide a counterhegemonic perception of women's subjectivities through undermining archetypal and limiting representations that freeze Iraqi and Chicana women in time and space. For this study, I traced three of these archetypal representations in a number of Iraqi and Chicana novels and short stories: the mourning/wailing woman archetype, the passive woman, and the unknowledgeable woman. I showed how writers, such as Ina'am Kachachi, Ana Castillo, Maysalun Hadi, Sandra Cisneros, and Lutfia al-Dulaimi, decolonize these reductionist othering figurations of Iraqi and Chicana women in their fiction and reinscribe new articulations of these women's identities and subjectivities that deviate from hegemonic and imperialist configurations.

The selected fictional works give space to new representations through portraying more engaging and more productive roles and subjectivities. Chapter two investigates what roles and subjectivities the female characters in *Tashari* by Ina'am Kachachi and *So Far from God* by Ana Castillo enact as a response to the loss of their country/land and family and whether their response is pathological melancholia or productive melancholia. In this chapter, Ina'am Kachachi and Ana Castillo challenge the limiting understanding of mourning and melancholia

that deems the melancholic woman as unproductive and configure her as insane and unhinged. *Tashari* and *So Far from God* present counterhegemonic subjectivities and a new consciousness that transform the melancholic affect of loss into a powerful incentive for change through the retrieval of the legacy of Khansa and La Llorona: Two iconic female figures whose legacy is associated with loss and mourning. I traced the enactment of the Khansa-like subjectivity in *Tashari* and the La Llorona-like subjectivity in *So Far from God*, and in both cases, the melancholic affect of loss is productive and healable.

Chapter three tackles the reincarnation of the legacy of two prominent female figures in Iraqi/Arab and Chicana literature: Shahrazad and La Malinche. This reimagining and reincarnation decolonize the distorted representation of these two figures in European and American hegemonic discourses as either passive or seductive. Dulaimi's short story, "Shahrazad and her Narrators," undermines the reductionist figuration of Shahrazad that freezes her subjectivity as a sexual being or a passive being rather than depicting her as the intellectual storyteller who produces a counterhegemonic discourse with her mastery and initiative. The magical realist story questions the archetype of the sexualized passive Arab woman and proclaims her active subjectivity. Sandra Cisneros reclaims the legacy of La Malinche to decolonize the archetype of the passive violated woman in her short story "Never Marry a Mexican." Clemencia, the protagonist, finds in sexuality a powerful tool to violate the patriarchal and racial hegemonic systems. Both stories present counter discourses that break the boundaries of hegemonic ideologies and go beyond the mythologized depictions of Arab and Chicana identities and present active examples of survival and resistance.

In chapter four, I explore the counternarrative and counter subjectivities provided by Maysalun Hadi and Ana Castillo in their novels *The Black Eyes* and *So Far from God*,

respectively, through the utilization of the legacy of Zarqa al Yamama and the *curandera*. The novels present the subjectivity of the protective woman who protects her community through enacting intuitive subjectivity— the Zarqa-like subjectivity, or the healer subjectivity—the *curandera* subjectivity. Enacting these subjectivities undermines colonial and neocolonial ideologies that sideline Chicanas and Iraqi women from playing active roles in national and ethno-national resistance at times of war and imperialist exploitations. The utilization of these figures in Iraqi and Chicana literature defies the violent, one-sided masculine rationality of the imperialist hegemonic powers, instead promoting peaceful, feminist, and integrative methods of resistance, such as female spirituality and intuition.

Throughout these chapters, I raise questions about women's subjectivities, and the reclamation of the legacy of fictional and historical female figures to undermine hegemonic gender ideologies in Chicana and Iraqi women fiction. I examine the legacy of a number of fictional and historical female figures and the revival of these legacies to create new discourses from oppositional locations. I investigate what subjectivities the female characters in the selected factionary works enact as a response to loss, identity erasure/distortion, and marginalization. I explore how these works change the invisibility of Iraqi and Chicana resistant and surviving subjectivities through focusing on their day-to day experiences, constructing new narratives and counter discourses that show the resilience and initiative of these women and reflect an oppositional agency and consciousness to oppressive ideologies whether imperialist or patriarchal. I explore gendered definitions of melancholia, marginalization of intuition and traditional healing practices, and identity distortion.

What is the significance of analyzing women oppositional agencies and anti-hegemonic strategies for survival and resistance in Chicana and Iraqi women's factionary works? In turning

to these areas of postcolonial and anti-imperialist literature, the most important reason is, as Mohanty confirms, to produce knowledge for ourselves (11), knowledge produced from oppositional locations that reflect the daily strategies followed by those women for survival and voicing their struggles. The selected works fill the gaps, erasures, and misunderstandings created by hegemonic masculinist discourses and histories through rewriting and recentering female narratives and legacies and forging new political and social consciousnesses and forming new self-knowledge. They encode new oppositional agencies and subversive narratives through celebrating cultural and historical female figures that constitute a significant part of Chicanas and Iraqi cultural memory. The purpose of these counternarratives is to speak from within the oppressed communities rather than speaking or writing for these communities to fill the gaps and voice the silences in hegemonic narratives.

This project is part of the broader discourse about intersectionality and women's self-identity and empowerment. It focuses on women's oppositional consciousness and answers inquiries about women's social and political agency and decentering hegemonic Euro-American representations of women. It focuses on studying representation of Iraqi and Chicana women as active subjects who have productive agencies and have their own perspectives of their subjectivities and their own situations, not as passive victims of their own traditional sexist cultures. The point is to provide diverse narratives and experiences that indicate the plural realities of Iraqi and Chicana women who tell and authenticate their own oppression and their own ways of survival and resilience.

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