“Rememory”: Memoir and Testimony on Women’s Human Rights in the Global South

by

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Abstract

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When the life writer has experienced violence, injustice, and political unrest within her region, memoir and testimonial writing requires a process involving the writer as victim and as witness and the reader, who also becomes a witness. This multi-layered process is further complicated by patriarchal structures that manipulate cultural values and place the quality of women's lives in jeopardy, which often leads to trauma that the victim revisits throughout her lifetime. Incorporating Toni Morrison's concept of "rememory" as illustrated in *Beloved,* I explore trauma not as an isolated event, but as a part of one's existence throughout a lifetime. Through the memoir *Across Boundaries* and other writings by Mamphela Ramphele, I explore the author's writing process with attention to the ways she approaches injustice, violence, and loss. I preface an analysis of Ramphele's memoir with a contextualization of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings, the testimonies of which powerfully represent the extent of injustices suffered by the South African people during the apartheid regime. Ramphele makes the effects of apartheid realistic and relevant in the anthropological research she conducts in the work hostels in Cape Town, and she reveals that the memories she is forced to revisit during the writing process continue to traumatize her. Nawal El Saadawi, a medical doctor in her early career as is Ramphele, also explores violence against women as a form of

injustice within the context of dominant cultural norms in her native Egypt and throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Her essays and works of fiction reiterate the recurring theme in her memoir *Walking Through Fire* that rape, domestic violence, and inadequate health care must decrease if women are to be active participants within a new, democratic society.

Preface

In the words of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." The basic premise that inspires the topic of my dissertation is that violence against women must end if there is to be an increase in conflict resolution, the preservation of natural resources, and economic empowerment for countries on the lower end of the world economic forum. I have often been asked why I am so passionate about the state of human rights for people in other countries and much less concerned with the plight of thousands of people in the United States, the country of my birth. As I reflect on the plight of women throughout traditionally patriarchal societies that often do not value the quality of women's lives, I am reminded to not take for granted the freedoms I enjoy as a result of my American citizenship. While the living conditions in many parts of the United States are significantly better than many regions throughout the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, I must also admit to injustices I have witnessed and experienced in my first twenty years growing up in the South. I did not escape institutionalized forms of racism that predominated the culture through which I was expected to view the world. On a very personal level, I also did not escape the victimization of sexual abuse and domestic violence suffered by many of the women I refer to in these five chapters. Throughout my study of psychoanalytic theory, memory, and trauma studies for this dissertation, so much of the reading resonated with the effects of memory I have experienced firsthand. I often feel, as Mamphela Ramphele admits of her two sons toward the end of her memoir, "There was a great emptiness inside me, which made it difficult to nurture even my own children . . . I had nothing to offer them emotionally. What pain they must suffer with a mother like me: a single parent, a career woman, an idealist given to running out of energy and collapsing in a heap, sometimes in the most inconvenient of times and places" (*Across Boundaries* 190).

Just before walking into the dissertation defense room, I confessed to my advisor, Meena Alexander, how saddened I was that these five chapters which I have struggled with would soon no longer require my nurturance. While I would like to say that the breakdown I experienced writing Chapter Two while reading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimonies of apartheid victims brought me closer to coming to terms with acts of violence I have witnessed firsthand, or that my subsequent breakdown while writing Chapter Three as Ramphele experienced multiple traumas helped me to understand my own memories of rape and domestic violence, only time will reveal whether or not the "process of healing" that created livable spaces for El Saadawi and Ramphele will serve my purposes as well.

While I enjoy strong relationships with dear friends and colleagues of the dominant culture, I claim far more allegiance to the Africaness than to the Americaness of my African American ethnicity. My experiences of violence and other injustices are treated as crimes in the West in ways that do not exist for my brothers and sisters in North Africa, Southern Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. In light of the accident of birth that divides my sense of globalization and democracy from that of people of color in the global South, I am angered, impassioned, and excited by the current revolutionary spirit of the people who believe that a fair and just government and a better quality of life are worth fighting for. To you, I dedicate this work.

Acknowledgements

I am forever indebted to Meena Alexander, the director of this dissertation, for her patience and insight into the literature and theoretical frameworks that have informed this work. I first met Meena in the Fall of 1998 as a student in her class entitled *Diasporic Bodies in a Multicultural Context*, or something of that nature. During that time, she introduced me to the autobiography of Angela Davis and in subsequent courses to the beauty of the rhythm of the words in her own poetry, memoir, novels, and critical essays. During the dissertation defense, Meena revealed to the two other members of the committee that there were times when she and I disagreed so strongly over the ideology and framework of the dissertation that she and I would go months without speaking to each other. As we share a common birth date, I suppose this was true! However, in all fairness, there were days when I was so engrossed in the testimonies of South African or Egyptian witnesses to violence that I did not speak to anyone else, either.

I am greatly appreciative of the expertise of Robert Reid-Pharr and Barbara Webb who also served as readers of the dissertation. The insight I gained from the Spring 2000 Toni Morrison survey class with Dr. Webb was invaluable for incorporating *Beloved* as the paradigm through which I explore the "unspeakable" nature of "rememory." In addition to the extremely supportive recommendations that I have received on my writing from Dr. Reid-Pharr, I thoroughly enjoy discussing literature with such a prominent African-Americanist who shares my fetish for James Baldwin.

I am truly grateful to my parents, Raymond and Vernie Williams, who constantly question the irrationality and recklessness of my academic and professional decisions, but who support me nonetheless. I am also profoundly appreciative of my sister Vonne Williams, who has inspired my anger against discrimination and my passion for social justice and human rights with her own living example. Lastly, this dissertation could not have been written without inspiration from my daughter, Reina Samuels, who represents my place in the circle of life.

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Introduction

Human Rights, Life Writing, and the Global South

> I write to emerge from the dark to the light of knowledge, from the chaos of the unjust world to a new world of justice, freedom, and love. I write to challenge the superpowers on earth and in heaven. Both are living on war, exploitation and deception. Both discriminate between people according to race, gender, class, religion, and other traits. I write to change myself and the world for the better.
>
> Nawal El Saadawi, *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi Reader*, 9

The goal of memoir and testimony is to be an agent of change in the quality of the lives of people in the global South—especially women—one which incorporates the life of the writer and his or her individual experiences. However, she is also a witness to the trauma caused by violence and the injustices of corrupt political structures. When the writer is motivated by a commitment to human rights, the autobiographical self within the memoir serves a purpose greater than merely recalling the events within one's life. The hope that the literary work will influence human rights culture—especially within a postcolonial setting such as one the world has witnessed in the "Middle Eastern Spring" of revolution—becomes crucial to the writing process. Is trauma an isolated episode or a lifelong occurrence in the lives of people who experience a daily threat of violence? Does witnessing acts of injustice inspire a feminist consciousness? How does the incarceration experience influence one's perception of injustice, quality of life, and human rights violations? Toni Morrison's *Beloved* would seem to be an odd segue into an investigation of these questions, but it is a justifiable one when incorporating questions of memory, trauma, and neocolonialism.

The relationship of history and fiction in *Beloved* is inherent in the complexity of the real-life Margaret Garner story the novel is based on. *Modern Medea* historian Steven Weisenburger writes that "Beloved . . . represents everything that cannot be *recaptured* through historical analysis, everything that cannot be summarized so that we can *claim* it as 'our' history"

(10). Weisenburger re-creates the historical account based on a similar premise as Morrison. Just as art imitates life, Morrison's fictional story recreates the horrors of slavery, ultimately embodied in the spirit of Beloved. In the genre of life writing, however, the opposite holds true. The writer creates an account of his or her life's events, consciously choosing the episodes to include that hold the most significance to the self that he or she wishes to convey to the audience.

Life writing complicates the marriage between history and literature; the writer's individual account of local and national events is inherently dependent upon historical accounts. As an example, this marriage is captured most vividly in the accounts of Antjie Krog and Alex Boraine during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. Krog and Boraine offer historical accounts of the hearings, however the victims who testified and the family members of the deceased are friends of Ramphele and she refers to them affectionately in her memoir. The life writing of Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi, respectively, are particularly multi-layered because of their roles as major participants in the civil and human rights movements within their respective countries. As Ramphele recalls the tragedy of Steve Biko's death, for example, she does so with the intimacy that only a lover can express—even as she grieves with the rest of South Africa and the world at the loss of a prominent civil rights activist. In turn, she admits to the traumatic "rememory" of Steve Biko's death: "I used to become physically ill every September . . . I wept for him" (*Across Boundaries* 148).

Within the field of medicine, both Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi witness the effects of violence, sometimes predicated upon victims as a result of patriarchal laws that often intentionally devalue the lives of women. Ramphele and El Saadawi are also internationally-known human rights activists in their respective countries, an element which fuels

each writer to construct the memoir as if it is intended to expose the stories of witnessing trauma as much as it is a chronicle of the author's life.

Thus, in the present climate where the lives of women from the southern regions of Africa to the Islamic Middle East (and the religious reference here is intentional) are commodified to reflect the lives of women in the worst light possible, the memoir serves as a vehicle to expose the individual stories of women with an emphasis on the suffering they endure daily. While exploitation is unfortunate, what has also emerged out of memoir and testimony of women in the global South is the multiple layers of trauma from the victim to the witness to the writer and, ultimately, to the reader. There are instances in which either Mamphela Ramphele or Nawal El Sadaawi have played all three roles. Suzette Henke writes that

> Autobiography is, or at least has the potential to be, a powerful form of scriptotherapy—and that, as such, it lends itself particularly well to the evolution of twentieth-century women's life-writing. Autobiography has always offered the tantalizing possibility of reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically inflected by language, history, and social imbrication. As a genre, life-writing encourages the author/narrator to reassess the past and to interpret the intertextual codes inscribed on personal consciousness by society and culture. Because the author can instantiate the alienated or marginal self into the pliable body of a protean text, the newly revised subject . . . is free to rebel against the values and practices of a dominant culture and to assume an empowered position of political agency in the world (xv-xvi).

Through the many evolutions of their respective careers as medical practitioners, political activists, and beyond, both Ramphele and El Saadawi have incorporated the process of writing into their lives as a means of acknowledging an individual experience of trauma as well as testifying to social injustice within the larger societal context.

Cultural constructs serve to further hinder the progress women are able to make toward a better quality of life in predominantly patriarchal societies. Attempting loyalty to the social and often religion-based expectations that compromise women's quality of life is a potential source of trauma for women who acknowledge the injustice of the belief system consuming their daily lives. Nawal El Saadawi writes of this predicament that

> The creation of a false consciousness among women makes them more amenable to submission and enslavement, more prone to become tools of propagating male desire, obedient victims of male violence, and domesticated to work in the home where they are needed or toil where needed outside the home, all in the name of culture, tradition, nation, religion or divine law. When women submit, they cease to rebel against patriarchal domination and fundamentalist teachings, and they lose their ability to question, think independently, and be creative (*The Essential Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 69-70).

Mamphela Ramphele recognized a similar line of thinking among both men and women as she conducted anthropological studies in the work hostels of Cape Town. Once the socialization of oppression has been internalized, it is difficult for a people to acquire the will and resources to combat the oppression.

Mamphela Ramphele, born December 28, 1947 in the city of Kranspoort in the Limpopo region of South Africa, was the third of seven children in her family. Within the patriarchal values of her immediate family, she began to see and to question the larger injustices of the apartheid regime at a young age. Ramphele begins her early career practicing medicine during her active involvement in the Black Consciousness Movement and its predecessor, the South African Students' Organization. Ramphele was incarcerated along with the majority of the leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement including Steve Biko, with whom she shared a close personal relationship. She gravitated toward anthropological research on the work hostels of Cape Town before being appointed as Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town and eventually holding an office as Executive Director of the World Bank. Toward the end of her memoir, Ramphele justifies that throughout the many evolutions of her professional life, the common thread has been her passion for civil and human rights. Her dedication to improving the physical health of the people in her community was as great as her commitment to the Black Consciousness Movement. Even as her career evolved from medicine to anthropology, she still served as an advocate and liaison between local political leaders and the hostel dwellers who she studied. In her explanation of this dual position in the community as an "honorary male," she

critiques the patriarchal structures that hinder the progress of women socially, professionally, and economically.

Nawal El Saadawi, born October 27, 1931 in Kafr Tahla, Egypt as the oldest of nine children, was encouraged to pursue her academic and professional endeavors in an otherwise traditionally conservative Islamic household. Nawal El Saadawi, also a medical practitioner and also actively involved in the protest movements in her country, was incarcerated under the Anwar Sadat regime for her research and publications investigating injustices against women, including female circumcision. Her two months in Al Qanatir Prison was an episode so traumatic that she dedicates both an entire memoir and a play to her period of incarceration. She gravitated toward academia after leaving the medical profession behind. El Saadawi has spent the majority of the latter portion of her professional life as a writer of fiction and essays, always motivated by the politics of gender, social class, race, and religion.

Both Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi incorporate coping mechanisms into their medical practice and political activism and, eventually, into the process of writing memoir. Witnessing violence or the effects of violence on their patients became a way to cope with the impending trauma, especially the distancing nature of the doctor/patient relationship:

> Many trauma survivors report that they automatically are removed from the scene; they look at it from a distance or disappear altogether, leaving other parts of their personality to suffer and store the overwhelming experience . . . Dissociation reflects a horizontally layered model of mind: when a subject does not remember a trauma, its 'memory' is contained in an alternate stream of consciousness, which may be subconscious or dominate consciousness e.g., during traumatic reenactments (van der Kolk 168).

Just as the fictional character Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* was unable to process her experience of trauma as a slave at the moment when the freedom of her children was in jeopardy, ("Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made . . . and carried, pushed,

dragged them through the veil," *Beloved* 163), Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi had to "store the overwhelming experience" of all they had witnessed and re-live the most violent and unjust moments by incorporating them into the writing process. The instances in each of their respective writings when they are unable to articulate a response to a tragic event is the point at which the memory exists in the "alternate stream of consciousness." The process of life writing forces memories into the actively conscious mind which in turn forces the writer to come to terms with past and present injustices she has experienced in her respective country. Patrick Hutton writes that, "Autobiography as a genre helps us to see the connection between memory and history in modern historiography because it is life history written from the perspective of recollection with a view to recapturing the sources of inspiration in earlier stages of our lives" (155). When those earlier stages include episodes of trauma as the writer's inspiration, the writer herself is empowered by the statement of social justice her life represents, and at the same time she inspires her readers' activism as well. The authors formulate these "sources of inspiration" by choosing which episodes of their lives are most likely to inspire others. When the personal history of one's life aligns so strongly with the national history of revolutionary movements, as in the cases of Ramphele and El Saadawi, the audience for life writing by these authors becomes one that is witness to the trauma suffered by the writer as well as those she refers to within the work.

The dissociation van der Kolk describes is a recurring theme within the writings of Ramphele and El Saadawi that works in conjunction with the experience of trauma as witness. Both women struggled with feeling as if they were "outsiders" in the rural communities in which they practiced medicine. Their privileged status distanced them from the population they served, no matter how highly regarded they were among the people. Francois Lionnet writes that, "There

is . . . a dissymmetry of class and ideology between them [the educated class] and uneducated masses, an inevitable dissymmetry, since literacy and education remain, to a large extent, steps that favor Westernization" (132). The conflict between natural medicine and formal medicine serves as an example. This level of dissociation serves both writers as a source of internal conflict as they are "automatically removed from the scene" of the women and men with whom they often feel a cultural affinity.

Often, this dual cultural relationship leads to internal conflict for the writer, resulting in the writer's necessity to explain or justify her philosophy as she moves between professional career and political activism. Fedwa Malti-Douglas observes, for example, that the backdrop of all of El Saadawi's texts is political in nature: "If medicine is less prominent than art in El Saadawi's life, both are played out against the backdrop of politics" (12). Advocacy for human rights is interwoven into El Saadawi's political activism, especially as she questions the rights of women throughout her texts. Also inherent in El Saadawi's political stance is her acknowledgement of Arab women's positioning within the global context, including misrepresentations and misconceptions in the West.

Chapter One introduces the basic premise of the overall study which is to argue that women who experience the trauma of being either a witness to or a victim of violence suffer from trauma for a lifetime, not as one isolated incident. I incorporate Toni Morrison's concept in *Beloved* of "rememory," or the revisiting of traumatic experiences throughout the lives of women based on institutionalized injustices they suffer. The character Beloved herself represents the suffering the former slaves endured during Reconstruction, and James Baldwin's philosophy that African-Americans have continued to suffer in anger against the entity of racism and its accomplices continues to endure even into the present. James Baldwin was a truly global citizen

whose scope extended far beyond his Harlem roots to include the beauty and humanity of people on other continents. The fluidity with which he understands his Africanness is not limited to the American experience, so that in his critique of/support of the Civil Rights Movement in America—referred to in this chapter—there is a clear sense of its significance on the global scale, including the concurrent Black Consciousness Movement of South Africa. Baldwin realizes, as do I, that it is only through an accident of birth that people of color in parts of southern Africa, northern Africa, the Middle East, and southeast Asia endure physical violations such as rape and domestic violence that are not considered crimes punishable by law and that violence against disenfranchised people—especially women—must end. The same mentality that inspired abolitionists during slavery to acknowledge the beauty and humanity of black people, albeit in a significantly different historical context, is that which inspired the abolishment of apartheid in Mamphela Ramphele's South Africa as well as the inevitable and newly-emerging democracy of Nawal El Saadawi's Egypt. Thus, significant to this chapter are also the parallels that exist between Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi, each with a revolutionary and evolutionary spirit of her own.

Chapter Two contextualizes the apartheid regime in which Mamphela Ramphele lived and how the injustices of governmental structure affected the lives of the black South African population in particular. The power of memory is revealed through those who testified in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings, however what is significant is that the majority of the testimonies were from the family members of victims who witnessed acts of violence against their loved ones, not from the victims themselves. For the witnesses of violence, the testimonies were a "rememory" of the pain their loved ones endured. Priscilla Hayner describes her observations of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings by writing,

> Remembering is not easy, but forgetting may be impossible. There are a range of emotional and psychological survival tactics for those who have experienced such brutal atrocities . . . Only by remembering, telling their story, and learning every last detail about what happened and who was responsible were they able to begin to put the past behind them . . . In South Africa, many survivors were able to hear these stories through the public hearings of those seeking amnesty for their crimes (2).

Because "forgetting may be impossible," the trauma of the victims could last a lifetime. Many of the victims and witnesses who testified revealed that they came closer to bringing closure to the acts of violence against them by the state, however others admitted to a continued feeling of emptiness inside. The other powerful aspect of the testimonies was, of course, that there were *listeners* who, in this case, included all who were reached by the media outlets covering the hearings. From a Human Rights Studies perspective, the testimonies themselves vividly exposed the atrocities of apartheid to the world in ways that could not have been revealed otherwise. Mamphela Ramphele adds to the body of literature and testimony with her memoir *Across Boundaries* in which she also admits that the writing process has assisted her in bringing closure to much of the violence she witnessed throughout the apartheid regime.

Chapter Three continues the analysis of greater communal suffering with an exploration of Ramphele's personal losses and how they affected her mental state as well as her writing process. Ramphele suffered seemingly multiple traumas at once, and each affected the other as she grieves the loss of her lover and comrade Steve Biko as well as the loss of Lerato, the daughter the two of them produced. Ramphele does not neglect to emphasize the human rights violations she witnesses, even in the midst of her individual suffering as well as the communal injustices that occur as a result of apartheid-related atrocities. Also included in this chapter is Ramphele's explanation of the significance of the writing process. Ramphele emphasizes how writing has helped her to cope with the experiences she has endured: "Writing the book was itself part of the process of healing which I have had to go through. I had to record that part of

my history [the Black Consciousness Movement] as objectively as I could. The participation of former fellow activists . . . made it more meaningful as a collective process of healing" (*Across Boundaries* 201). Ramphele does not undermine the power of memoir in coming to terms with her losses of which she says, "There are many times when I have felt that I have had to deal with more losses than most people" (*Across Boundaries* 196). This statement precedes a description of the death of the author's niece, whose daughter Mamphela is her namesake. Ramphele writes that, "No one has yet explained the cause nor has an inquest been held into her death. The loss suffered . . . is hard to describe. For me it was like losing a second daughter. She had been under my care for seven of the eight years I spent in Lenyenye . . ." (196). True to the idea that Ramphele has suffered trauma through multiple losses is the connection she makes between the death of her niece and that of her own daughter. However like El Saadawi, Ramphele maintains the importance of exposing through writing memoir the corrupt governmental practices that have caused harm and death to so many people in South Africa, representative of people of color on a global scale:

> I cannot do justice in this book to the complexities of the problems facing indigenous minorities globally. But I will only note the dangers imposed by the devastating combination of guilt and deep-seated lack of respect shown by the white colonial authorities, and the role of victim adopted by the colonised. Coupled with this role is a glorification of indigenous culture which poses the greatest threat to the ability of indigenous people to transform their social relations" (194).

In this passage, Ramphele also addresses how political and economic progress for people of color has been complicated by commodification and exploitation, themes which El Saadawi also addresses throughout her fiction, memoir, and critical essays.

Chapter Four traces the growth of Nawal El Saadawi as a fiction writer and also examines the damaging effects of commodification and exploitation of the lives of Middle Eastern women in the wake of the memoir boom. I chose to examine the novels *Memoirs of a*

Woman Doctor, Woman at Point Zero, and *The Circling Song* in the chronological order in which they were published not only to highlight the nuances of El Saadawi's growth as a fiction writer, but also because each of the works correlates to a major event in the writer's life. For example, El Saadawi writes in her first novel *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor,* that, "I had just graduated from the school of medicine in Cairo. It expressed my feelings and experiences as a woman who was a doctor at work, but still performed the roles of a wife and a mother at home" (*Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* 7). While El Saadawi admits that, "Although I have subsequently written many novels and short stories which may be more sophisticated," she also explains that she wrote the novel with "a lot of anger against the oppression of women in my country, but also a great deal of hope for change, for wider horizons and a better future" (*Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* 8). *Woman at Point Zero* was published just before *The Hidden Face of Eve*—which resulted in El Saadawi's arrest and imprisonment—and is the fictional representation of one of El Saadawi's case studies as she conducted qualitative research on the lives and belief systems of Egyptian women. *The Circling Song,* as El Saadawi notes, was written after Anwar Sadat's dismissal of her position as Director General for Public Health Education in the Ministry of Health (*The Essential Nawal El Saadawi* vii).

The Hidden Face of Eve is also included in this chapter as an analysis of El Saadawi's philosophy regarding women's physical and emotional health, including the effects of trauma. While not a work of fiction, *The Hidden Face of Eve* positions El Saadawi as a witness to the subjects she incorporates into her focus groups. While her critique of the cultural and political predicament of women throughout her memoirs *Walking Through Fire* and *Memoirs From the Women's Prison* assume the introspection necessary for memoir writing, the works of fiction offer El Saadawi a practical stance of distance and literary creativity necessary for a novel. Kai

Erikson notes that, 'Traumatized people often come to feel that they have lost an important measure of control over the circumstances of their own lives and are thus very vulnerable. That is easy to understand. But they also come to feel that they have lost a natural immunity to misfortune and that something awful is almost *bound* to happen" (194). Women who brace themselves against an idea of the inevitability of trauma navigate their surroundings in a much different way than those who live with a reasonable sense of security over their personal safety, as is often found in Western societies where violations of the body are considered crimes punishable by law. Erikson notes that a feeling of control over the circumstances of one's life is necessary such that the vulnerability women may feel in its absence breeds not only fear but also helplessness and a temptation to accept the circumstances of gender as inevitable. Throughout many of the examples of women who participated in El Saadawi's study, there was this sense of helplessness among the women. However, this helplessness should not be confused with disempowerment. Nor should it be interpreted as an overarching paradigm for lives of women throughout North Africa and the Middle East. The memoir boom has brought an onslaught of publications from writers in both the West and the global South, however it is the lives of women in traditionally patriarchal societies who have been most commonly exploited for the voyeuristic pleasures of a Western audience. This chapter also examines whether the onslaught of memoir has had a positive or negative effect on the advancement of women's human rights worldwide, but especially in the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Chapter Five addresses the essence of Nawal El Saadawi as a memoir writer and the ways in which her passion for writing has sustained her throughout the most traumatic periods in her life, including imprisonment and witnessing violence and death. Smith and Watson write that, "The life narrator depends on access to memory to narrate the past in such a way as to

situate that experiential history within the present. Memory is thus the source, authenticator, and destabilizer of autobiographical acts" (22). Throughout *Walking Through Fire*, there are several instances of Nawal El Saadawi merging a memory from her childhood into an act of violence or a form of social injustice that she experiences in her adult life. A recurring theme in her memoir is the trauma she has witnessed and how this has influenced both her writing process and her sense of social justice. El Saadawi continues to elaborate on these two themes throughout *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*. Although the prison memoir chronicles the events of a concentrated period in the author's life, it nonetheless takes up El Saadawi's dedication to writing as a form of resistance. In a later essay, El Saadawi summarizes the spirit of her commitment to both the writing process and to social justice by writing, "Egyptians who stand up and challenge the global neocolonialist powers and their collaborators in local governments are labeled dissident, communist, nationalist, or feminist. They are punished according to the effectiveness of their dissidence; this ranges from losing their job and censorship of their writings, to prison and even death" ("Dissidence and Creativity" 173). Pen and paper were forbidden to her during her incarceration, which gives her an opportunity to reflect on the importance of the writing process in her life once she is deprived of the most basic writing materials. El Saadawi embodies the true sense of the communal narrative as she recounts in the memoir not only her own experience, but also those of her fellow prisoners. She admits more than once in the memoir that her perspective is ever changed as a result of the close relationships she develops amongst the women with whom she shared a cell, both those who had committed criminal acts as well as her fellow political prisoners.

The trauma of witnessing is truly unspeakable for both Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi during the various periods of their lives that they each choose to highlight in their

respective works. While the term global South encompasses a wide geographical range representing numerous nationalities and cultural practices, the commonalities of patriarchy in its most traditional form has had an undeniable influence on the writing lives of the women and men who have dedicated their lives to the advocacy of human rights through protest and a spirit of revolution that is in the process of improving the quality of the lives of disenfranchised people worldwide. This spirit of revolution is alive and well in areas such as Egypt and Libya where the struggle for democracy continues. Ramphele and El Saadawi continue to be actively involved in this struggle, and in the words of Nawal El Saadawi during a February 5th interview with Nicholas Kristof in Tahrir Square amidst thousands of protesters, exactly a week before Hosni Mubarak stepped down from office, El Saadawi expresses her excitement over the potential for democracy in her native Egypt: "I am here because I feel I am born again! It's a very spontaneous revolution not related to the left or the right or the Muslim Brothers or anybody. If you see there are ordinary young students, women and men who never knew politics. So this is a real revolution! Most of the women never came out of their houses. Some of them are veiled, some with the *niquab*. *They came out!*"

Chapter One

Trauma Studies and its Literary Context in Memoir and Testimony

> For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is nothing new, it must always be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness (139).
>
> James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

The act of witnessing trauma maintains an intense relationship to the writing process in that writing memoir, autobiography, or testimony in particular forces the writer to reflect upon experiences that he or she has witnessed and survived. In effect, the memoir forces the writer back into what can potentially be a violent memory. For women writers who live in patriarchal countries, the act of writing represents an even greater form of resistance against the injustices that occur against women due to the cultural norms often present within specific patriarchal cultures. Cathy Caruth writes that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). The act of writing memoir invites this recollection of events throughout the writer's life, including witnessing acts of violence. However, women who live within certain forms of patriarchy where there is potentially a daily threat of violation are never far removed from the experience of trauma. This is as true for writers of memoir such as Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi who have witnessed human rights violations against women as it is for the victims themselves. Thus, the act of writing itself can be harrowing as the writer forces him or herself to revisit memories of witnessing violence, even as the memories continue to revisit the writer throughout his or her lifetime. This revisiting, or "rememory," is a major element of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a fictional account of the real life story of Margaret Garner's act of murder against her own child during the post-slavery Reconstruction Era. The

effects of slavery resonate not only throughout Morrison's work of fiction, but also through the essays of James Baldwin and his account of the plight of African Americans. Baldwin's criticism of the Black America of the 50's and 60's is similar to the position of many women in present-day patriarchy. Acts of violence that occur against people of color and especially women are ongoing in certain environments, and writing memoir highlights this crisis for the writer as both victim and witness.

Toni Morrison's writing process for *Beloved* is connected to concepts of memoir, trauma, and memory in multiple layers. As she was writing *Beloved,* Morrison researched memoir and testimony by and about slaves. These lived experiences of the slaves influenced her fictional work. As Morrison writes *Beloved,* she attempts to explore the "interior life" of the slaves, that which has been absent from most slave narratives in which a more formal stance was preferred by their authors ("The Site of Memory" 110). Morrison coincidentally reveals that the slavery experience was a source of trauma in many ways. Slaves who either witnessed or experienced acts of violence both physically and psychologically and had those incidents recorded left a legacy for their readers to witness through reading. Morrison locates her own identity within her writing process and her affiliation to slavery by writing, "For me—a writer in the last quarter of the twentieth century, not much more than a hundred years after Emancipation, a writer who is black and a woman—the exercise is very different" (110). Morrison further acknowledges that she believes writing the novel is a responsibility she owes to her heritage: "If writing is thinking and discovery and selection and order and meaning, it is also awe and reverence and mystery and magic. I suppose I could dispense with the last four if I were not so deadly serious about fidelity to the milieu out of which I write and in which my ancestors actually lived" (111). The severity of violence and adversity the slaves faced was so pervasive that its effects have been felt for

several generations afterwards. The influence of slavery is similar to Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's definition of trauma:

> While the trauma uncannily returns in actual life, its reality continues to elude the subject who lives in its grip and unwittingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and reenactments. The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during, and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of 'otherness,' a salience, a timeless ubiquity that puts it outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect (68-69).

Felman and Laub investigate the effects of trauma in the same vein as Cathy Caruth and Ruth Leys, suggesting that it is an isolated phenomenon. However, Felman and Laub also address the complexity of the effects of trauma on one's daily life. When "normal reality" includes the potential threat of rape and other forms of physical violence, it is not so much the root cause of trauma; it is knowing that social and sometimes religious law is the justification for the violation of the right to physical and emotional well being. There would be a sense of "otherness" that Felman and Laub refer to amongst the women who suffer from injustice were it not for the collective mentality of fear that overarches many of the women's lives. Even those who are fortunate enough to acquire a certain amount of privilege, such as Ramphele and El Saadawi, live within the confines of patriarchal law and are aware of its effects on women's quality of life. Morrison states that she has a responsibility as a writer to illustrate the trauma of the day-to-day threat of violence slavery perpetuated the same way Felman and Laub claim that the experience of witnessing carries. Within the context of describing her goal in writing another one of her novels, *Song of Solomon,* Morrison herself even makes a connection between the act of witnessing, the plight of women in the global South, and the plight of African Americans:

> I use the phrase 'bear witness' to explain what my work is for . . . I have this creepy sensation . . . of loss. Like something is either lost, never to be retrieved, or something is about to be lost and will never be retrieved. Because if *we* don't know it (what our past is),

> if we women don't know it, then nobody in the world knows it—nobody in our civilization knows it . . . But if we women, if we black women, if we *Third World women in America* don't know it, then, it is not known by anybody at all" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 139, italics mine).

Morrison continues in *Beloved* the theme of bearing witness which began in *Song of Solomon* as she weaves a continual thread which includes a "sensation of loss" commonly associated with Caruth and Leys' classic definitions of the witness' relationship to both testimony and trauma. Morrison emphasizes her obligation as a writer to making this trauma known through her fiction; similarly, the writer of memoir or testimony experiences a similar process of returning to a potentially traumatic past which, in the cases of Nawal El Saadawi and Mamphela Ramphele, is often complicated by a socially-constructed patriarchal system.

Morrison even connects the slave narratives that partially inspired her work to her own project of writing *Beloved*. The power exhibited by the narratives of Olaudah Equiano and Harriet Jacob are still prevalent in current memoirs as well, and Morrison observes the similarities in motives:

> Whatever the style and circumstances of these narratives, they were written to say principally two things. One: 'This is my historical life—my singular, special example that is personal, but that also represents the race.' Two: 'I write this text to persuade other people—you, the reader, who is probably not black—that we are human beings worthy of God's grace and the immediate abandonment of slavery.' With these two missions in mind, the narratives were clearly pointed ("The Site of Memory" 299).

Both El Saadawi and Ramphele write their memoirs with similar convictions; they realize the impact their writing will have on the women whose lives are represented in their respective texts.

El Saadawi and Ramphele each write memoirs revealing not only the violence they witness as medical practitioners and civil rights activists, but also the political ramifications of the social context within which they write. The social laws of patriarchy indicate that women should not reveal private aspects of their lives and in fact that they should lead very private lives relegated primarily to the domestic realm. Thus, the act of writing itself can be seen as an act of

defiance against patriarchy: “We should read feminist memoirs as conscious acts of rebellion. Writing and publishing one’s life history was moving beyond secret rebellion to announce one’s reasons for breaking the gender code” (Conway 87). This “gender code” encompasses the idea that women enter restricted territory even as they engage in the writing process.

Moreover, writing in the autobiographical genre becomes a political act for women of the global South whose writing is viewed differently from their male contemporaries. Chinua Achebe—while primarily known as a novelist—has also written *Home and Exile* chronicling his early migratory life. Similarly, Wole Soyinka, while widely known as a poet and playwright, has also written *You Must Set Forth at Dawn: A Memoir*. Each of these writers is expected to acknowledge his ethnicity in his autobiographical work. Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary* is even similar in scope and context to Nawal El Saadawi’s *Memoirs from the Women’s Prison.* However unlike their male counterparts, for whom writing autobiography is seen as an act representing only themselves as individuals, women of color are called upon to represent their entire ethnicity, nationality and gender. The gender-specific experiences of childbirth and, arguably, domestic abuse are not addressed first-hand in the autobiographical works of male writers. Often, gender is not a primary factor in life-writing by men in the global South:

> A white man has the luxury of forgetting his skin color and sex. He can think of himself as an ‘individual.’ Women and minorities, reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex or color, have no such luxury . . . The emphasis on individualism as the necessary precondition for autobiography is thus a reflection of privilege, one that excludes from the canons of autobiography those writers who have been denied by history the illusion of individualism (Friedman 39).

Writing then serves an additional purpose for a memoirist from the global South who is expected to represent her gender and nationality as connected entities within the work. Gender-specific episodes are intertwined with cultural values with the expectation these details enrich the content

of the narrative. To this end, writing memoir is intricately tied to gender, for one's gender is an aspect through which the writer locates her identity: "For the woman autobiographer the major question becomes how to see one's life whole when one has been taught to see it as expressed through family and bonds with others" (Conway 4). Adding to the dichotomous relationship between representing individualism and community is the certain amount of privilege that writers such as Ramphele and El Saadawi enjoy within their respective political regimes, despite cultural beliefs about women.

Knowing the possibility of political implications her writing will have, a woman memoirist from the global South must carefully consider the content of her work as she may be seen to represent not only herself as an individual but also her family and nationhood. Thus, she must be selective in the details of her life she chooses to include to a greater extent than a male western writer may be. Inevitably, a writer such as Mamphela Ramphele or Nawal El Saadawi must choose elements of her life that lend themselves to her activism and political views. Sidonie Smith writes that, "Tracing or discovering a pattern of progressive stages, the autobiographer suggests how she has become who she is: the childhood that moved her toward some vocation, her educational and intellectual experiences, her entrance into the public arena, her successes and failures, her reflection of that achievement in later years" (52). What problematizes this progression is that the events have already occurred that could have led the writer in any number of directions. She chooses aspects of her life that highlight her activism and the times in which she challenges the prevailing patriarchal values. Such selectiveness advances the writer's agenda as a witness to acts of violence or as an activist supporting the advancement of women's human rights. In fact, Toni Morrison writes that such a dedication to writing as a political act is the most necessary element for writing in any instance: "If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or

whatever I write) isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything . . . which is to say yes, the work must be political. It must have that as its thrust . . . [some critics believe that] if a work of art has any political influence in it, somehow it's tainted. My feeling is just the opposite: if it has none, it is tainted" ("Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," 344-345). Morrison's dedication to writing which promotes the true self, including one's political convictions, is essential for the woman writer of memoir who has witnessed acts of violence against women.

The specific limits that patriarchal systems of government place on women further complicate the issue of memoir and autobiography, for the memoirist must take extra precaution to avoid cultural misinterpretation by a western audience. While the readership for most may seem less of a priority, the readership must be considered. This is especially true if the author intends to appeal to a certain audience whose goal it is to advocate for improving women's human rights. Sidonie Smith writes that, "Precisely because she approaches her storytelling as one who speaks from the margins of autobiographical discourse, thus as one who is both of the prevailing culture and on the outskirts of it, she brings to her project a particularly troubled relationship to her reader" (49). This is especially the case with Nawal El Saadawi and Mamphela Ramphele who are both of a privileged class within their respective nationalities. Each of these writers enjoy a certain amount of social status, however an awareness of the living conditions of the rest of the women in the community is evident in each of these writers' accounts. They each also acknowledge that were it not for social status, they each could be victims instead of witnesses to the lack of adequate health care for women and vulnerability to rape and domestic violence. Because the cultural value system affects people across socioeconomic lines, their privilege was little consolation in the face of the oppression that

people within their communities suffered daily. Carolyn Heilbrun writes that "Patriarchal oppression interacts with race and class, and male violence, like oppression related to religion or sexual preference, cuts across all races and classes" (63). Both Ramphele and El Saadawi elaborate on episodes in which they feel an affinity to rural populations through carrying out health care initiatives, often after being banished or removed from more prestigious assignments within their respective medical practices.

To consider the memoirs and autobiographical writing of Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi through the lens of patriarchy means more than merely analyzing a form of writing within a system of social law. Patriarchy is also a system of beliefs contributing to the mentality with which men and women approach both their writing and their audience:

> And if the autobiographer is a woman of color or a working-class woman, she faces even more complex imbroglios of male-female figures: Here ideologies of race and class, sometimes even of nationality, intersect and confound those of gender. As a result, she is doubly or triply the subject of other people's representations, turned again and again in stories that reflect and promote certain forms of selfhood identified with class, race, and nationality as well as with sex. In every case, moreover, she remains marginalized in that she finds herself resident on the margins of discourse, always removed from the center of power within the culture she inhabits (Smith 51).

Writing under such conditions causes the memoir or autobiography to inevitably become a testimony of the living conditions of the writer and his or her community. Readers locate the writer's identity in terms of race and gender, however social class is also an element in establishing the writer's perspectives on women's human rights issues, especially in the case of Nawal El Saadawi and Mamphela Ramphele who were socially privileged. While each of the narratives is an expression of the writer's individuality, each of these writers can inevitably be identified as members of an oppressed group despite social class, especially in the case of the Apartheid regime that Ramphele endured.

In her anthropological research, Ramphele notes that even crime is a gendered issue and a source for unsafe living conditions, particularly for women. In describing the living conditions for women in Cape Town, Ramphele observes,

> The vulnerability of a woman living alone, or possibly with her children, in the densely crowded, isolated resettlement areas whilst her husband is away as a migrant worker is one of the hidden realities of life in many parts of the country. In Ekuvukeni in KwaZulu, for example, a graphic description was given to one of us [anthropologists] when visiting the area, of how *women would lie in fear in their homes* whilst outside the *tsotsis* would call, 'Is anybody at home?' If the woman should answer (or indeed not answer at all) then the gang would know that there was no man in the house and that it was thus safe to break down the door and rob the women and children inside (*Uprooting Poverty* 155, italics mine).

The fear of theft of one's possessions that Ramphele describes is connected to the threat of physical harm that often accompanies robbery. To experience constant fear in a place such as the home which, in the West, has such connotations of safety is a testament to the unsafe living conditions of those who suffered and survived apartheid-ridden South Africa.

The interconnectedness of women's roles within society and their cultural or religious values perpetuates challenges that women face such as in Ramphele's example above. El Saadawi writes that, "Gender, or women's oppression is inseparable from class, race, and religious oppression. The patriarchal class system propagates the idea that the oppression of women and the poor is a divine law and is not man-made" (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 15). El Saadawi is a writer of fiction and essays who spent her career as a medical doctor both critiquing and embracing the patriarchal structure of her native Egypt. Inherent throughout her writing is the indication that she has witnessed violence and other injustices against women that have influenced her perceptions of women's roles and expectations.

Mamphela Ramphele, a South African anthropologist and also a medical doctor, has also witnessed institutionalized injustice by surviving the apartheid era. Ramphele, like El Saadawi, has chosen to write a memoir that critiques her government and its inherent inequality.

Witnessing violence against women as a matter of course and acknowledging the possibility of being victimized oneself can be traumatic. However, to write about such events forces the writer back into the memory of witnessing the act of violence. Ramphele witnessed the effects of violence against women in her medical practice as did El Saadawi, and the process of writing forces her to revisit these injustices. Both Ramphele and El Saadawi live and work in a constant state of feeling the effects of what they each have witnessed.

The chosen professional career of both Nawal El Saadawi and Mamphela Ramphele should not be taken for granted. The nature of the medical doctor is to cure ailments including physical bodily harm. Practicing medicine places the doctor in a position to potentially witness the effects of acts of violence against the body more often than in most other professions. Felman and Laub observe that, "It is, of course, not a coincidence that the key-witness whose position appoints him [sic] to speak for all is a physician. Not only is the doctor's stance designed naturally and symbolically for the most insightful *body-witnessing* of history; but, by virtue of his job—his professional struggle against death—the doctor's testimonial stance is, of necessity, at once one of *resistance* . . . and one of *preservation* (of life, as well as of its memory)" (112). Attempting to serve patients despite limited resources lends itself to the "resistance" and "preservation" inherent in considering inadequate health care as denial of a human right. Including such episodes in a memoir could force the writer to re-live the trauma of witnessing such violations.

Each of these writers both evolved professionally from medicine to social science and explained the practicality of the transition based on patriarchy's effects on women, both mental and physical. Mamphela Ramphele writes of herself reflectively toward the end of her memoir that "My training as a doctor and anthropologist enables me to stretch across the boundaries

between natural or medical science and social science in interesting ways" (204). Similarly, Nawal El Saadawi writes more extensively of the connection between the two that

> As a medical doctor in rural Egypt in 1956 I asked myself why poor people became more sick than rich people, and I discovered the relationship between poverty and disease. When I asked myself why people became poor I discovered colonialism and dictatorship and politics. When I asked myself why girls are mutilated by female circumcision I discovered slavery in history and the patriarchal class system. But what happened when I started to discover the original causes of physical and mental diseases? I lost my job in the Ministry of Health in Egypt in 1972 under Sadat. I was placed on the blacklist as a writer and a novelist (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 23).

El Saadawi oscillates between her understanding of medicine and psychology to arrive at the interconnectedness of colonialism and women's human rights such as physical abuse and inadequate health care. Each of these writers realizes that within patriarchal environments the physical issues surrounding women's health are inherently connected to social conditions that must also be studied holistically along with medicine in order to arrive at answers to women's constant state of fear leading to trauma.

Trauma as it is traditionally defined, however, is only partially appropriate in considering the plight of women in the global South. The classic definition of trauma is that it

> . . . seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is otherwise unavailable. This truth . . . cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language (*Unclaimed Experience* 4).

Cathy Caruth suggests that this wound is an isolated event in a brief episode of one's life, which contrasts with the idea that a person may suffer a lifetime of gender-based injustices including violence and inadequate healthcare. The "truth" that "remains unknown" in this case exists because of ingrained cultural beliefs that are rarely challenged. The danger is that this "reality" can potentially be distorted so that placing the physical safety of women in jeopardy by denying (or not acknowledging) their human rights can be considered acceptable within patriarchal society. Writers whose memoirs challenge those beliefs such as Ramphele and El Saadawi

embody the "wound that cries out," which elevates the memoir from simply narrating the story of the writer's individual life to exploring the culture in which the writer locates herself.

Caruth further departs from the idea of trauma as an ongoing condition by elaborating on Sigmund Freud's theory that "the traumatic accident—the confrontation with death—takes place too soon, too suddenly, too unexpectedly, to be fully grasped by consciousness" (*Unclaimed Experience* 101). For women who live under conditions of prevalent domestic violence and limited availability to adequate health care, the possibility of death is ever present. The memoirs of Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi are rife with stories of violent acts against women. To live in a constant state of awareness of one's mortality is potentially as traumatic as one definitive traumatic episode in a person's life. The reality of the possibility of death as an ever-present possibility departs from Caruth's theory of the suddenness of death and the effects of that abruptness.

Ruth Leys defines trauma similarly to Caruth in describing trauma as an isolated event, however Leys expands her definition by emphasizing the effects of those who relive their experiences as Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi do. Leys writes that, "the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience into normal consciousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. The experience of trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented *as* past, but is perpetually reexperienced [sic] in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present" (2). The idea that trauma exists in the present is the common thread that connects the experiences of women in the global South and a patriarchal tradition. Whereas a belief system is part of a cultural tradition, the forward thinking influenced by modernity and the globalization of economies and cultures causes the writers of memoir to question acts of violence against women disguised as precautions to ensure their safety.

Bouthaina Shaaban, a Syrian writer/professor-turned-government official who hails from a region near El Saadawi, addresses the issue of violence against women and its psychological connection by writing

> Indeed, the word *fear* is quite central to my feminist analysis; through personal experience and close observation of others I have become certain that fear is the thing that most distorts women's characters. I was often living in a state of fear—lest I was discovered bleeding, writing a poem, choosing a husband . . . Why, I ask myself, are our lives as women reduced to spells of dread, anxiety, and apprehension? It might well be that because men detect something terribly strong in us they become obsessed with the effort to suppress this, whether by reducing us to obedient servants or turning us into sexual objects. It is certainly for fear of the power of female sexuality that circumcision is practiced. It could also be due to their fear of true female strength that men always present women as the 'weaker sex.' This analysis might at least explain some cases of rape, battering, and sexual abuse (15).

The constant state of fear Shaaban refers to correlates with the ongoing trauma of the women she interviews in her work *Both Right and Left Handed* in which she also writes of episodes in her own life of experiencing this kind of fear first hand. Shaaban connects the mentality of women to acts of violence that lead to the endangerment of women's rights to physical safety and emotional stability. However, as women advance in education and professional status, social status will inevitably follow. Patriarchal countries have not escaped the influence of advanced information systems bringing global cultures closer together. Along with advances in technology has come a closer examination of the livelihoods of women in the global South as well as the memoirs describing their plight.

In *Extremities,* Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw depart from both Caruth and Leys by approaching trauma from a more literary than psychoanalytic standpoint. They identify trauma as, "the experience of both victims—those who have suffered directly—and those who suffer with them, or through them, or for them, if only by reading about trauma" (2). Miller and Tougaw focus on the interchange that occurs between writer and reader, thus broadening the scope of how trauma occurs. The interchange that occurs between one who suffers an act of

violence and one who witnesses, however, is closer to Mamphela Ramphele's experience of trauma as well as Nawal El Saadawi's, to a certain extent. These two writers weave the details of their individual lives as medical practitioners and human rights activists into those of the men and women they serve. Ramphele and El Saadawi express throughout their memoirs a sense of empowerment on some occasions and helplessness on others during the episodes of their lives they choose to expose in the form of memoir. Yet, inherent in each of their narratives is a belief in questioning societal norms that jeopardize women's rights to adequate health care and safety from violence. Nawal El Saadawi, for example, extensively recalls in *Walking Through Fire* an episode in her medical practice in which a young girl had been in her care who had suffered physical and emotional abuse from her husband. She ends the episode by explaining the girl's suicide which El Saadawi wholeheartedly believes she could have prevented:

> I stood helpless on the bank of the river wearing my white coat, my arms hanging uselessly at my side amidst a crowd of helpless women who, dressed in their black *gallabeyas*, watched as Masouda was pulled out of the water . . . I had failed to save Masouda from her fate, abandoned her when she needed me most . . . (113-115).

El Saadawi revisits this event in her writing with deep regret as a witness to Masouda's experience of trauma. Miller and Tougaw do not prioritize the one who experiences an act of trauma over the one who witnesses its effects. Instead, they suggest that there is an exchange that occurs between the two that causes the writer—in this case El Saadawi—to relive an event that exemplifies her questioning of societal law at the same time that she expresses her helplessness against it.

Similarly, Mamphela Ramphele recalls an incident from her childhood in *Across Boundaries* in which she is introduced to questioning traditional gender roles by highlighting the defiant actions of her mother:

> Like most of his contemporaries, my grandfather was an authoritarian patriarch. He ruled his family with a firm hand. To underline his control over his descendants, he issued an edict that all his grandchildren were to refer to him as *Papa* and his wife as *Mma* [sic]

> whereas their own parents were to be called *Brother* and *Sister*. This was a major symbolic statement about the lines of authority in the family. But my mother would have none of it. As a compromise, my father suggested the use of *Daddy* and *Mommy*—an interesting way of diverting patriarchal tensions through flight into another language. But my mother stood her ground . . . having been successfully challenged by my mother, the edict was sufficiently weakened to allow my father's younger brothers flexibility in their own family relations . . . My mother fought many battles within this patriarchal family system. She walked a tightrope as she carved out space for herself [and] . . . established a delicate balance between challenging those aspects of the many rigid rules about gender roles, lines of authority and the conduct of relations that violated her dignity, and avoiding actions that would undermine the system and thus create anxiety and instability (*Across Boundaries* 13-14).

Ramphele is specifically addressing the patriarchy of her own family as a single unit here, however she includes cultural implications in the first line by indicating that such values were common. The subtext of the example Ramphele presents is that she would in turn inherit the philosophy and strong will of her mother which would guide her through the challenges she would face in both her activism and medical practice even in the face of the Apartheid regime which would limit her educational and career choices.

Ramphele also addresses the power of language in this episode and especially the influence of English on her grandfather's decision. Ngugi wa Thiong'o places into context the influence of language on patriarchy: "The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. Hence language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces in the Africa of the twentieth century" (*Decolonising the Mind* 4). Ramphele reports the symbolism of her grandfather's actions—as well as her mother's opposition—with the use of language as the catalyst. Thiong'o suggests that language maneuvers social interaction and serves as a means of a people to form an identity. This is especially true in patriarchal systems and the ways in which traditional societies in the global South are interpreted by the western world.

The belief that women do not deserve human rights is central to the idea of denying their humanity, thus creating unsafe living conditions that could potentially lead to violence. Vincanne Adams writes that "Globalization does not necessarily mean universalization . . . even though a culture is globalized, it might still not partake of certain universalist privileges" (381). The advancement of technology and the increased availability of informational resources to women should not be mistaken as improvement in women's living conditions. Globalization of information is, however, causing women in the global South to be more aware of their quality of life compared to that of the West. Still, if patriarchal social systems do not allow women to become equal participants in policy making, women become vulnerable to injustice. In "Commodity Chains and Gendered Exploitation," Wilma Dunaway observes that

> Even though there have been groundbreaking analyses . . . of how the world-economy structures the interconnected cycles of high child mortality and high fertility, most world-systems analysts forget the biological reproductive role of women. We have also analyzed the household economy, subsistence production, and handicrafts production—the very domestic domains of women—without acknowledging the inputs of females, often without mentioning women at all (128).

Dunaway's claim is disturbing on a number of levels. One major issue that arises is that ignoring women's impact on the global market diminishes their humanity. Failing to acknowldge their humanity justifies patriarchy's denial of their human rights. Paradoxically, identifying women solely within the domestic realm limits the possibility of their expansion into more productive and respected ways of participating in the global market. Dunaway also notes that "the perspective has transformed women into appendages of households, thereby effectively erasing them from the world-system" (131). This predicament also leads women to potentially experience ongoing trauma resulting from a denial of their human rights. Ramphele seeks to bring about improvement in this area throughout her anthropologic research on workers in migrant camps and her early human rights activism in the South African Students' Organisation.

She has acknowledged this void and sought to combat its repercussions through advancements such as her position as Managing Director of the World Bank.

The idea of trauma within the context of what Toni Morrison calls "rememory" adds an additional layer of what confronting injustice against people of color means, especially with women. This is the challenge faced by El Saadawi and Ramphele as writers and witnesses to violations against women, both within the practice of medicine and within the injustices of the greater society which cause the women in their respective villages to seek medical attention. This issue is addressed by memoir theorists such as Suzette Henke who writes that a memoir serves the purpose of

> Reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically inflected by language, history, or social imbrication. As a genre, life-writing encourages the author/narrator to reassess the past and to reinterpret the intertextual codes inscribed on personal consciousness by society and culture (xv-xvi).

When the writer's daily life is fraught with the possibility of physical and emotional violence or even witnessing such acts, the possibility of "reinventing the self" becomes that much more challenging. This is especially the case in a patriarchal environment where women often have limited opportunities to participate in policy making. In evaluating past events and deciding what to include or not in a memoir, the writer forces him or herself to consider the effect of these decisions on the reader. For the human rights activist writing memoir, such as Ramphele or El Saadawi, the choices become crucial because the agenda of writing serves a specific purpose:

> . . . Acts of remembering test the values that nations profess to live by against the actual experiences and perceptions of the storyteller as witness. They issue an ethical call to listeners both within and beyond national borders to recognize the disjunction between the values espoused by the community and the actual practices that occur . . . They issue a call . . . to recognize the humanity of the teller and the justice of the claim (Schaffer and Smith 3).

Nawal El Saadawi and Mamphela Ramphele each compiled their experiences into memoir form with the specific purpose of offering a perspective of not only their lives, but also their views on

how the laws of patriarchy affect the rights of the women around them. As Schaffer and Smith suggest, El Saadawi and Ramphele choose to offer questions about how women's human rights are compromised as a result of beliefs of the culture they each lived in. Each writer also chooses to include episodes from her life during which she questions the cultural norms within her respective culture. Many of these episodes include a focus on injustices specific to both the health field and to women. As women writers from the global South, both Ramphele and El Saadawi address the juxtaposition of societal values and their own interpretations of social law that Schaffer and Smith refer to.

These ideas are predicated upon the values of neocolonialism which connect African Americans to their African origins. This kinship is significant because in the words of Toni Morrison, "Africanism is inextricable from the definition of Americanness—from its origins on through its integrated or disintegrating twentieth-century self" (*Playing in the Dark* 65). In this same text Morrison also notes that, "Encoded or explicit, indirect or overt, the linguistic responses to an Africanist presence complicate texts . . . they give the text a deeper, richer, more complex life than the sanitized one commonly presented to us" (66). Although Morrison is referring here more specifically to American literature, an argument can be made for expanding this notion to include the natural connection between the African continent and the first generation of African slaves. While this first generation of African slaves is culturally far removed from the later generations that the novel *Beloved* focuses on, the affinity between the two is still worthy of note, especially within the context of trauma and human rights violations.

Thus, the concept of American slavery which inspires Morrison's *Beloved* shares a kinship with the idea of injustices against women in the global South. When the narrator repeats at the end of Morrison's work that "It was not a story to pass on" (274), he or she is referring to a

trauma that is "unspeakable," as is exemplified in the moment at which Margaret Garner decides her children are better off dead than living in slavery after briefly experiencing freedom. In this same epilogue, the narrator also explains that, "Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody knew her name" (274). The idea of this inability to state the obvious is not unlike the unspeakable trauma that occurs when women who suffer from inadequate health care or who face injury from rape or domestic violence in the global South acknowledge the injustice of these acts. Writers such as Ramphele and El Saadawi choose to include in their works the idea that women's rights to safety are in danger of violation daily as a result of patriarchal law. As a clarification of this predicament, Mahnaz Afkhami writes that

> . . . Neither Islam nor the culture of Muslim peoples is per se an obstacle to women's achieving rights. Rather, Muslim women face patriarchal structures that certain men in power . . . misrepresent as religion and culture. The function of this misrepresentation is to keep women where they best serve the patriarchal priorities. Where the civil society has already somewhat developed . . . the fundamentalist clerics seek to force women back to conditions women have surpassed and therefore find unacceptable (236).

The writer's mention of the "patriarchal priorities" can be interpreted many ways. However, Afkhami suggests that the justification for abuses against women result from a misinterpretation of religion and culture that is similar to the ways in which Biblical passages were often used by slaveholders and even the slaves themselves to justify American slavery. The mentality that convinces a people that they do not deserve rights causes them to be complacent and accept the belief that they must inevitably suffer. However, the other part of Afkhami's argument refers to the globalization of communication and economy that has influenced traditionally acceptable roles for women. In "Is Globalization Good for Women?" Susan Jaggar writes that "In the global South, services have contributed to a rise in maternal mortality . . . Less education and longer hours of domestic work obviously contribute to women's impoverishment by making it harder for them to attain well-paying jobs" (6). Moreover, what occurs specifically during times of

political unrest in the global South is that, "militarist governments often endorse masculinist [sic] ideologies that define men as warriors, promoting a culture of violence that spills over into violence against women on the streets and in the home . . . Women's sexuality is regarded as a national resource, their sexual autonomy is controlled, and they are expected to provide sexual services for warrior heroes" (4). As beliefs about expectations of women evolve, so do questions about whether or not women deserve the right to physical and psychological safety. James Baldwin expresses this same idea in relation to the question of the rights of African Americans during the Civil Rights Era:

> To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity. Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations (*The Fire Next Time* 9).

In writing this work, Baldwin defines what he perceives as the identity of African Americans during a time when new beliefs regarding civil rights were beginning to surface in America. Similarly, women in the global South are now constructing an identity that is creating itself outside of the confines of patriarchy, redefining the roles that were previously established. Mamphela Ramphele, for example, is an immediate past chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Independent Development Trust, the largest non-governmental organization focusing on development capacity building (investing.businessweek.com). Both Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi as medical doctors have constructed their careers outside of established roles for women. When Ramphele and El Saadawi write memoirs that emphasize trauma caused by violence, they each raise the question of women's human rights in the global South that has this same effect that Baldwin describes. James Baldwin suggests that a national "loss of identity" occurred during the Civil Rights Era that caused White America to be forced into a new

philosophy of the lives of both African-Americans and their own. During their early years of practicing medicine, each of these women was forced into an assignment serving a rural population where views of women's roles were traditionally domestic. Instead of becoming discouraged, they each became more enraged at the injustice of rape, domestic abuse, and inadequate health care that women in rural villages were exposed to. It is no wonder that each of these writers includes vivid details of the lives of women in the memoirs of their lives during the time they each were politically active students in an organized movement.

James Baldwin's philosophical stance is similar to that of many critics of the patriarchal system of government. He writes in a letter to his namesake, who represents the future, the same as Denver does in Morrison's text: "You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a *nigger*" (4). Patriarchy gives women a similar message regarding their submissiveness. Women are taught to honor certain interpretations of religious or cultural law and to lead lives without expecting safety or protection from violence. They can be "destroyed" by believing they are destined to do so. Just as in Baldwin's message to his nephew, women writers and activists who live and work under patriarchal regimes are encouraging other women to beware messages that they are inferior and deserve acts of violence against them. This idea is expressed by Afkhami who writes, "The infringement of women's rights is usually exercised in the name of tradition, social cohesion, morality, or some complex of transcendent values. Always, it is justified in the name of culture" (234). In other words, both men and women are conditioned to believe that for women to step outside of prescribed roles upsets the balance patriarchy creates with socially accepted subservience. For women to attempt a quality of life beyond what currently exists would cause social relationships to diminish, including women's proscribed marital and parental responsibilities and expectations. El Saadawi has written and

spoken extensively on the effects of globalization with one of her primary concerns being its effect on women. In one of her more prominent essays, El Saadawi writes

> In this world economic order, the indispensible sacrifices of structural adjustment are required for the globalization of the economy and of markets . . . This fatalistic, almost metaphysical conception of necessity, has recourse to religion. Religion is the ideology used by the rich to exploit the poor in the South. The majority of the poor in the world are women, youth, and children. These days a new term, 'the feminization of poverty,' is often mentioned. It means more women are becoming poor . . . Gender, or women's oppression is inseparable from class, race, and religious oppression. The patriarchal class system propogates the idea that the oppression of women and the poor is a divine law and is not man-made (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 15).

In this passage, El Saadawi attempts to get at the root of patriarchy's justification of oppressing women. She suggests that the issue is primarily economic. However, she points out that religious ideology is also a culprit along with class and race. El Saadawi thus lays the groundwork for opening a discussion of the challenges women face in attempting to change the social order. El Saadawi's reference to a globalized economy and markets suggests that as women become more active participants in the global climate, prior beliefs are "shaken to their foundations" in the same way that Baldwin describes. Beliefs regarding women's roles must inevitably broaden so that improvements can occur: "the paradox lies not in the pairing of sex and gender or woman [sic] and women's differences per se but in the bringing together of otherwise distinct social dynamics and distinct social practices in the analysis of women's differences . . . women do not live gender here and race there and class there but experience all simultaneously" (Forsythe 150-151). Just as there is a danger in attempting to separate these issues in examining the plight of women, it is equally as unfair to assume that all women in the global South experience the same plight with exactly the same level of severity. On one hand is the notion of basic survival: "If you are being tortured, you do not care as much about your cultural survival as you do about your physical survival" (Adams 400). On the other end of the spectrum is the right to express one's beliefs: "Human rights discourse is partly about sustaining cultural differences by creating

a political and moral space within which people are allowed to practice their cultures as they wish" (Adams 401). The idea of practicing culture becomes problematic, however, when it involves jeopardizing women's human rights. The mentalities of both men and women are influenced by these cultural beliefs. Throughout their memoirs, both El Saadawi and Ramphele put their respective forms of government on trial for distorting the idea of culture in the way Adams describes.

James Baldwin criticizes world systems and specifically the United States government for the mental repercussions caused by slavery and Reconstruction. Baldwin's accusations are directed at a country that he, as an African-American and a homosexual, claims some allegiance to, which troubles him even further. Baldwin confronts racism while at the same time clarifying its causes. The message Baldwin gives to his nephew is similar to that which modern feminists bring before the United Nations today:

> I know what the world has done to my brother [the nephew's father] and how narrowly he has survived it. And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. One can be, indeed one must strive to become, tough and philosophical concerning destruction and death, for this is what most of mankind has been at since we have heard of man (5).

The kind of deep, courageous contemplation Baldwin conveys is also evident in the memoirs of Ramphele and El Saadawi. This is the message of change that each of these women sought to illustrate as they wrote their memoirs. Ramphele and El Saadawi also claim allegiance to their respective countries, which makes the message even clearer that improvement in the quality of women's lives is necessary.

In his work, James Baldwin further expresses his anxiety by outlining the conspiracy, albeit perhaps an unconscious one, against his nephew by writing

> This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should

> perish. . . You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and *for no other reason*. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity (7).

Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi acknowledge that they were each given this same message regarding women's roles in South Africa and Egypt, respectively. As human rights and civil rights activists, each of these writers decided that people of color, and especially women, did not have to accept this status. The context of the explanation Baldwin describes, naturally, is that his nephew and African Americans as a whole should not accept it either.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* extends this thought and connects it to the daily threat of physical violence and vulnerability that exists in a slave's life and especially in the lives of women. The site of trauma occurs in what Morrison terms rememory within the text:

> Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there . . . where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over—over and done with—it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what (35-36).

As previously defined by Caruth and Leys, the act of what Morrison terms rememory involves revisiting the site of trauma. When this site is engrained in everyday life as it was during slavery, it is inescapable. It could potentially come from a spouse. It could be the vulnerability to rape that women face in countries where war or political unrest occurs. In either of these instances, the idea that trauma is an isolated event is questionable. In fact, this form of trauma is not associated so much with the effects of physical violation. It is the result of something much deeper: the sense that injustice exists without possible resolution. Morrison's fictional character, Sethe, embodies this mentality and is considered insane in the same way Nawal El Saadawi's

patients become insane, according to reports. Consequently, the realization that the dilemma her patients face reached beyond physical conditions caused El Saadawi to study psychology and to always allow herself to be inspired by literary art while practicing medicine: “In art you feel whole, with no separation between body and mind, spirit or soul. With no separation between form and content, or art and politics or economics or medicine” (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 23). El Saadawi realized that because the “site” of “rememory” was inescapable, so was the state of trauma she witnessed among her patients. In addition, writing memoirs and novels enabled her to explore all these aspects of humanity without limiting herself to one form or genre.

The real-life tragedy that inspired Morrison to write *Beloved* exemplifies the trauma of the novel’s fictional characters: “Gaines tracked them to that place and soon had the cabin surrounded by U.S. deputy marshals from Covington and Cincinnati. Thinking all was lost, Margaret Garner seized a butcher knife and nearly decapitated her two-year-old daughter, Mary. She was turning on her other three children when slave catchers burst in and subdued her” (Weisenburger 5). The novel revolves around the title’s namesake, Beloved, as the embodiment of trauma from the memory of the institutional injustice of slavery that was so severe the main character would rather her children die than experience it. Sethe serves as both witness and victim to acts of injustice that, within the institution of American slavery, were considered commonplace. Slaves were often subjected to physical violence and psychological abuse. There was little penalty for the ill treatment of slaves by slaveholders and such acts were even expected by both parties. Sethe attempts to escape slavery because she *believes* a life free of institutionalized violence is possible. From their first day of freedom, Sethe notes the positive changes within herself and her family: “All [of the freed slaves] taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and *decide* what to do with the day . . . she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was

one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (*Beloved* 95). Sethe notes the contrast between a past life of violence and their present lives when this freedom is threatened by approaching slave catchers. Sethe did not see her attempt to kill her children as an act of hatred or anger, but rather one of care and concern for her children's well-being. As one who had experienced the cruelty of slavery firsthand, she would rather for her children to die than to suffer the same fate as she and all slaves whom she had witnessed. After experiencing the freedom from enslavement that was jeopardized upon the realization that the slave catchers had arrived at 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe seemed to immediately react out of shock but made a conscious decision to protect her children from slavery:

> . . . She was squatting in the garden and when she saw them and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And *if* she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe (163, italics mine).

Sethe's rationale during this moment when she decides to murder/save/free her children represents the separation of mind and body that is so characteristic of revisiting a site of trauma: "Memory is in crisis in the novel because its ability to shape the events into narrative wholeness has been jeopardized by deep slits in the psyche—splits seen as violations of the self" (Marks 53). Morrison expertly creates the possibility that Sethe was driven to act partially out of a subconscious reaction—also typical of traumatized beings—by including the "if" of Sethe's thought process. The "split" of Sethe's "violation of the self" is the force behind her reaction to the approaching slave catchers.

Throughout *Beloved* are stories both Baby Suggs and Sethe tell of the brutality of slavery which serve to illustrate the injustice of slavery. In a description shortly after Sethe's thoughts as

the slave catchers approach to take her and her children back to Sweet Home and back into slavery, for example, Sethe returns to the site of trauma months later after being jailed:

> She remembered when the yard had a fence with a gate that somebody was always latching and unlatching in the time when 124 was busy as a way station. She did not see the whiteboys [sic] who pulled it down, yanked up the posts and smashed the gate leaving 124 desolate and exposed at the very hour when everybody stopped dropping by . . . When she got back from the jail house, she was glad the fence was gone. That's where they had hitched their horses—where she saw, floating above the railing as she squatted in the garden, schoolteacher's hat (163-164).

The symbolism in this scene is threefold. On one hand, there is the fence representing Sethe's fond memories of 124 Bluestone Road as a "way station," a haven where escaped slaves were brought on their way into freedom and an overall better quality of life. The men who tear the fence down destroy what was in Sethe's mind a physical symbol of comfort. Morrison expertly creates a vivid description of the violence with which the men demolish the structure so that what was once a place of solace is now "desolate and exposed." Inherent in this illustration and choice of adjectives is Morrison's further emphasis on the physical violence and destruction of family structures and human life overall that was so pervasive during slavery. Moreoever, Sethe's remembrance of an absent place where the fence used to be harks back to the idea of rememory that Morrison establishes earlier in her text. The "places, places are still there" even though the fence is not; the site of trauma revisits Sethe psychologically even in the fence's absence as she remembers the event in which blood was shed and death occurred as she attempted to, in her words, "put my babies where they'd be safe" (164).

Sethe is the embodiment of both victim and witness to violence in the novel that reinforces the idea of trauma as an ongoing state as opposed to an isolated event. A number of events throughout the novel force Sethe into constantly being "riddled with psychological restlessness" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 109). While the major event in the novel that causes Beloved to become a ghost is Sethe's act of murder, prior to this event is a brief description of

Sethe as a child witnessing her mother being hanged. Moreover, she is the victim of a gang rape while being six months pregnant with Denver. Sethe indicates that the most painful aspect of the rape was not the act itself or even the beating that occurred immediately after which was so severe that "it made a tree" on her back (*Beloved* 17), but the rapists' stealing her breast milk which was the most painful memory. Thus, it is not surprising that Sethe responds that she does not "go inside" when Paul D proposes to her the possibility of them building a life together (*Beloved* 45-46). Because trauma is primarily a psychological condition (although caused by severe stress on one's physical state), Sethe's choosing to not "go inside" indicates that she realizes the severity of the painful memories she does not wish to embrace. Thus, Sethe's continuous goal is "to start the day's serious work of beating back the past" (*Beloved* 73), so that she can maintain some sense of sanity in the light of all she has witnessed and experienced. Weinstein summarizes Sethe's conscious attempt to not revisit her painful experiences as both victim and witness by writing, "This private hell is far more terrible, more stocked with atrocities, with things that were done to you that cannot be revisited much less processed" (434). The "unspeakable" nature of the experiences of slavery are enough to cause anyone to attempt to suppress the "rememory" which, according to many critics of the plight of African Americans today including James Baldwin, still haunts the race in the present. Marks writes that "The resistance to memory is a resistance to opening the inner self to otherness—otherness that can be, and has been for the African American, threatening. The inner self, especially for the African American, has historically been vulnerable to outside attack" (128). Sethe fails in her attempt to suppress her traumatic experiences, however, as the ghost of Beloved becomes the symbol of the horrors of slavery.

Beloved herself embodies the trauma interwoven throughout the text that, according to Morrison, is the epitome of the experience of people of African descent in America. Arnold Weinstein observes that, “Beloved walks into the book on page 50 and stays for the duration” (440), which is symbolic of the repercussions of slavery that have remained throughout the history of African Americans for centuries and continues into the present. Weinstein also notes that, “We learn at the outset that this baby ghost has some good reasons for spite: Its throat was cut” (429). Throughout much of James Baldwin’s writing is the same sentiment that African Americans are justified in their anger because of the way America has treated them: “He [the African American] is perhaps the only black man in the world whose relationship to white men is more terrible, more subtle, and more meaningful than the relationship of bitter possessed to uncertain possessor” (“Stranger in the Village” 127-138). Weinstein further writes that, “Even if, in this book’s plot, a child’s throat is severed, the cord cannot be cut” (442). Literally, even the personification of the “rememory” in the form of Beloved can never be erased for those whose ancestors lived in this era. Morrison explores the “interior” lives of slaves in her work by interweaving moments of happiness for Sethe—such as when she and Halle perform their own wedding ceremony or when Paul D first arrives at 124 Bluestone Road—into times when the rememory of slavery overpowers her. Morrison succeeds in her attempt to create an element of humanism within the lives of the slaves, for as Weinstein writes,

> We have always known our bodies to be the site of both pleasure and pain, but we all too easily lose sight of this mix of flesh and blood when we conceptualize our moral or spiritual values. In this regard, Morrison adds something precious to our notion of story and self, because she understands them both to be, first and foremost, from beginning to end, *embodied* (449).

Despite this concept of embodiment, the idea that women suffered very specific violations that were different from the male experience of slavery is highlighted in the recollections of Baby Suggs and Sethe. Consideration of *Beloved* as a feminist work by many

scholars is essential because of the matriarchal structure of the work with Baby Suggs, Sethe, Denver, and eventually Beloved as the main residents of 124 Bluestone Road. Samuels and Hudson-Weems emphasize Morrison's intentional structure serving the novel's purpose by writing, "What Morrison also unearths . . . is the silenced voice of the black slave women, for more often than not her story had been told by the black male narrator. . . Although the women who appear are not mere fixtures, for through them the horrors of slavery are unraveled" (97). For this reason, Paul D feels out of place in the house from the time Beloved appears and for the remainder of the novel: "He [Paul D] wanted her [Beloved] out, but Sethe had let her in and he couldn't put her out of a house that wasn't his . . . 'What is it about her vex you so?' . . . 'I can't place it. It's a feeling in me'" (66-67). The very idea of memory is even considered to be feminine. Kathleen Marks writes that, "The notion of woman as ordering principle is not new to literature. The sense here that memory is somehow active as well as feminine, however, resounds in Morrison's use of female heroines and her desire to create whole stories out of the fragments of memory as they appear" (140). *Beloved* is one of Morrison's most prominent works in which the effects of memory demonstrates the danger of denying the humanity of a people, and as Morrison herself notes, "That is the disability we must be on guard against for the future—the female who produces the female who produces the female. You know there are a lot of people who talk about the position that men hold as of primary importance, but actually it is if we don't keep in touch with the ancestor that we are, in fact, lost . . . When you kill the ancestor you kill yourself" ("Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" 344). The episode of slavery in American history is significant in the "rememories" of future generations. Morrison sought to capture this sense of connectedness in writing *Beloved* so that the trauma the real-life Margaret Garner

experienced in slavery could remind the present generations of the thread connecting them to the past.

Beloved highlights human rights abuses primarily experienced by enslaved women, but conceivably this also affected the men in the novel through witnessing. Physical violence and rape are experienced by Sethe almost simultaneously in a scene in which Sethe describes Schoolteacher's nephew beating Sethe so severely that her back opens into a "chokecherry tree" (16), which is the result of her telling on the boys for raping her (17). Later in the chronology of the novel Paul D reveals that Halle witnessed the gang rape on his wife, which Paul D reasons is what caused Halle's insanity (68-69). After slavery, Paul D recalls memories of still being in bondage on the chain gang in which he witnesses his fellow prisoners forced to fellate the male prison guards (107-108). Even Beloved herself admits that she feels vulnerable as "dead men lay on top of her . . . Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light" (241). All of these instances of sexual abuse were designed to demean the slaves/former slaves, and its effects traumatized them into wanting to separate the physical abuse from their "rememories." Thus, Plasa notes that "In the novel, free African American men and women have survived rape and slavery but they are not free of the recurrent experience of trauma. They can neither contain nor repress their memories, and hence survival is . . . a kind of crisis" (85).

Inclusion of Toni Morrison's participation in a lecture series on memoir and autobiography is testament to how intimately connected *Beloved* is to memoirs about social injustice. Thus, Morrison's work can be considered a symbol representing memoir and testimony on women's human rights in the global South because of the women's issues it presents. Rape, domestic violence, and at times a lack of adequate health care are forcing women in the global

South into hopeless situations. The memoirs of El Saadawi and Ramphele bring to light women's violations within economically and politically disenfranchised nations. Their expertise as medical practitioners enabled them to witness firsthand the severity of women's human rights abuses as well as their respective governments' responses to these acts. An implication of helplessness is present throughout many assessments either of them makes about society's beliefs about and treatment of women. Felman and Laub connect the experience of trauma to the act of writing while acknowledging that, because of the absence that exists during trauma, the two conflict:

> The testimony is inherently a process of facing loss—of going through the pain of the act of witnessing, and the ending of the act of witnessing—which entails yet another repetition of the experience of separation and loss. It reenacts the passage through difference in such a way, however, that it allows perhaps a certain repossession of it (91).

The trauma of witnessing, based on Felman and Laub's definition, is ever present in the writings of Ramphele and El Saadawi. These two writers from the global South give voice to the trauma they witness just as Beloved's physical being in the flesh serves this purpose in the novel.

Morrison's text is only one part of a larger context in which to explore the plight of women in the global South and the memoirs written by witnesses to illustrate their plight. Just as different forms of government exist in both South Africa and Egypt, so do variations on the social laws of patriarchy and neocolonialism. Black South Africans continue to live with the aftermath of Apartheid as can be illustrated by the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Post-Apartheid South Africa shares characteristics consistent with the American Reconstruction era that *Beloved* is based on, which is in keeping with Aime Cesaire's philosophy that "no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick

civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased" (17-18). South Africa's political and economic turmoil are the physical evidence of the effects of colonization through Apartheid. While the popular belief is that only people of color suffer the effects of a government-sanctioned denial of human rights, the truth is that everyone suffers. Likewise, Egypt continues to suffer under a corrupt form of government that does not consistently ensure human rights or civil rights for all of its citizens.

Mamphela Ramphele and Nawal El Saadawi symbolize through their lives as human rights activists and as writers of memoir that changes in the mentalities of individuals and in governmental practice are necessary to improve the quality of life of all people—and especially the women—of the global South. Baldwin closes the letter to his nephew with a message of hope which again mirrors the message addressed to many women within globalized economic systems today. He writes

> . . . The black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations. I said that it was intended that you should perish by never being allowed to go behind the white man's definitions, by never being allowed to spell your proper name. You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention; and, by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality (9).

Ramphele and El Saadawi are using their writing and their activism to exemplify an idea similar to Baldwin's. When women speak out against injustice and advocate for human rights, tradition turns on its head. As people begin to question the usefulness of traditions whose justifications benefit one group's human rights over those of another as Ramphele and El Saadawi have done throughout the evolutions of their careers, change begins to become possible. Thus the ideology of Baldwin's contemporary Toni Morrison is an appropriate ending for this chapter, for in the words of Samuels and Hudson-Weems, "Morrison's ultimate message is that each person should and must respect the reality of the human landscape of the world, with its unlimited possibilities

and interpretations, if humankind is to achieve wholeness, if the global community is to once again be whole. Pass it on" (142).

Chapter Two

Contextualizing *Across Boundaries*: Neocolonialism and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Hearings

> South Africa is in the throes of having to come to terms with the legacy of apartheid. This process has not been and is not easy. Apartheid's all-encompassing legacy pervades every aspect of our lives. It often seems to us as if the dead are coming back to haunt the opportunities of the living. In thinking about this phenomenon the metaphor of the biblical figure Lazarus comes to mind. He represents the *memories* of the dead and persecuted of South Africa's apartheid *past as they intrude on the life of the present*. Lazarus represents the re-animation of South Africa's memory (James and van de Vijver 1, my emphasis).

The apartheid regime which riddled the South African government from 1945 to 1994 has significantly impacted Mamphela Ramphele's sense of justice. Although Ramphele faced discrimination throughout her professional endeavors in the medical field and in her activism in the South African Students' Organization (SASO), the site of trauma that affects her most deeply seems to lie in her descriptions of women surrounding her who suffer as a result of gender-specific violence and inadequate health care. Her memories of these women complicate her process of writing memoir as much as they do her anthropological studies, *Uprooting Poverty* and *A Bed Called Home*, both inspired by the migrant labor population forced into unbearable living conditions as a result of apartheid. Findings from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which exposed many of the abuses men and women suffered as a result of apartheid, are similar to the stories by and about this population which Ramphele recalls in her memoir. Likewise, the women who were brave enough to testify to the commission were torn between their allegiance to the government and uncovering necessary information for reparation. Such an allegiance to the oppressor is common within the form of colonialism that characterized South Africa's form of government. As Ramphele realized this, she made efforts to advance South Africa toward a new direction as a more active participant in the globalized market. This was her goal in her student activism and throughout her professional life, which she articulates

by writing, “My transgressive activities have been focused on one central goal: transforming major institutions of our society” (*Across Boundaries* 204).

Colonization, in its most traditional sense, forced the black South Africans who constitute the majority of the country’s population into segregation. This population was also denied basic civil rights. It is no coincidence that the apartheid ideology of racial discrimination developed so closely to the height of Nazi Germany’s quest for racial purity during the Holocaust and World War II (Guelke 5). The rationale of colonialism that accompanies an ideology, according to Edward Said, epitomizes the plight of the black population of South Africa:

> Underlying social space are territories, lands, geographical domains, the actual geographical underpinnings of the imperial, and also the cultural contest. To think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate or depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land. The actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about (78).

Sub-Saharan Africa is commonly known as one of the richest regions in the world for its natural resources, however its black population reaps little of the benefits from the region’s wealth. As policies are instituted which deny equal opportunities for land possession to people of color, a denial of quality of life and lack of basic human rights becomes almost inevitable. The major focus of Ramphele’s anthropological research, chronicled primarily in *Uprooting Poverty* and *A Bed Called Home*, is the population of migrant workers who are systematically denied basic rights due to inadequate living conditions resulting from resettlement and denial of property ownership.

Mamphela Ramphele personally experienced this form of discrimination and credits the apartheid regime directly for laws restricting land ownership by black South Africans. She further emphasizes the racism inherent in such restrictions:

> At the beginning of 1987, after many battles with the racist housing system in Cape Town and the UCT bureaucracy, I finally purchased my own house in Mowbray. It had to be registered in the name of the University to circumvent the legal barriers to black ownership of property in white suburbs. Many other black South Africans had to have ‘fronts’ to acquire property in the

> land of their birth. My white neighbors, after initially protesting against our presence to the local police, relaxed when they realised that the heavens were not going to fall in. One of them said to the local police that they had not realised I was a medical doctor! How my profession made me less black only white racists can explain (*Across Boundaries* 169-170).

Even as a University of Cape Town faculty member—an individual of relative socioeconomic and intellectual status—Ramphele was denied home ownership on the basis of her race and ethnicity. Upon learning of her medical practice prior to her profession in academia, she was partially pardoned for her ethnicity. However, she comments that such a vindication only further exemplifies racism rather than improving race relations and segregated living conditions that the majority of South Africans endure even in the current post-apartheid regime.

Apartheid and segregation, although related, are not synonymous terms however. Such a distinction is necessary so that apartheid is not generalized to suggest its comparability to forms of segregation in other countries, including pre-Civil Rights Movement conditions in the United States. Student organizations of the 1960's in both South Africa and the United States were advancing the cause of people of African descent in their respective countries, however the forms of government each group protested against were quite different. Adrian Guelke notes that "Two grounds have commonly been advanced for distinguishing between segregation and apartheid. First, it was argued that apartheid was applied with much greater thoroughness and ideological fervor than segregation. . . Secondly, it was argued that it was the different context of the post-war world that distinguished apartheid from segregation" (34). Another major difference is that the United States' form of government is still considered a democracy while that of South Africa, until the 1994 election, essentially, was not. Still, people of color in the two nations participated in similar movements throughout the 1960's incorporating similar methods to achieve greater human rights and civil rights for their respective populations. Leaders of the South African Students' Organization and Black Consciousness Movement have acknowledged

in their speeches and publications a great admiration for the leaders and philosophy of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements (Ramphele, Pityana, et al).

Apartheid affected South Africa's black population culturally, economically, and perhaps worst of all, psychologically. The psychological effects are most damaging because once the colonized population accepts that it does not deserve rights, it also accepts that the colonizers are superior. According to Childs and Williams, this mentality in turn affects the ways in which the colonized population forms its identity: "If we now consider the colonizer's role in identity formation, we find that while the colonized are placed in junior positions they are also frequently co-opted into the overarching dominant culture and, for purposes of containment, often denied a separate identity" (70). This denial of a separate identity is what causes feelings of loyalty to the government and a sense of allegiance among the oppressed population. Such a loyalty to the government in South Africa caused resistance to those who testified to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The hearings did not begin until apartheid had been abolished, however the organized student movements of the 1960's and 70's of which Mamphela Ramphele was a major participant brought worldwide attention to the opposition from within South Africa's oppressed population. Julian Kunnie reports that, "These waves of political dissidence led by both Black workers and students that were solidly organized during the 1960s and protracted in the 1970s culminated in a situation of political ungovernability over Blacks and economic instability for whites in the 1980s, compelling the white commercial and industrial establishment to realize that apartheid was cracking in certain quarters" (40-41). The harsh and unnecessary banishment and detainment orders endured by leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement, including Ramphele who spent four and a half months in prison and was subsequently banished (*Across Boundaries* 115), were a testament to the ruling National Party's

realization that a psychological transformation of ideals was taking place among the black population.

Thus, Mamphela Ramphele recognizes the manipulation of language by the colonizer as a means of further oppressing the already-impoverished population. Through writing her memoir, Ramphele uses language to empower herself as an agent of change in the mentalities of the colonized, especially women. Ngugi wa Thiong'o expresses the influential nature of language in colonialism by writing

> The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others . . . The domination of a people's language by the language of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised. (*Decolonising the Mind* 16).

While Ramphele indicates that even in her early life she recognized the pervasive nature of colonization on the psychology of black Africans, her recognition of the severity of the dangers of colonialism began to take root at Natal University as she joined the South African Students' Organization and became immersed in the philosophy of social empowerment espoused by the Black Consciousness Movement.

However, the goals of the Black Consciousness Movement were not so easily achieved. Ramphele recalls many instances in which she encountered resistance to programs designed to improve the quality of life of her people, especially in rural areas. Following are her observations of the mentality of local people in the recently-opened Zanempilo (The One Bringing Health) Community Health Center of which she was director:

> Development activists like myself had to learn the hard way that the capacity of poor people to own both the successes and failures of projects they are engaged in is severely limited. One needs self-confidence and self-esteem to be able to acknowledge one's failures and weaknesses. The humiliation of conquest, racism, and poverty has undermined many people's self-esteem by

> labeling them as mistakes of God's creation . . . Poor people's experiences of systems, both official ones and those run by people fighting for freedom, have not inspired them with trust. They have been let down too often, and have too often seen corruption operate in the name of regulations and procedures, to believe that there is a reason to trust systems (*Across Boundaries* 143).

Ramphele admits to her unpreparedness for the level of distrust displayed to her and her colleagues based on their higher socioeconomic status, in spite of being the same race and ethnicity as the local population. However, she acknowledges the apartheid-ridden history that has been a catalyst for the feelings of distrust. In addition to the challenges of limited support from a racist bureaucracy, development activists had to face additional opposition from the very population they were attempting to serve. Ramphele would continue to battle with mentalities of oppressed people throughout her career as an academic, including the period in which she researched the dissertation which was eventually to be published as *A Bed Called Home*. While conducting her research, she would encounter a similar mentality among the hostel dwellers and reports that, "It challenged all the romantic notions I had about the capacity of poor, oppressed people to organise themselves out of their position of powerlessness and become part of the process shaping a more egalitarian society" (*Across Boundaries* 168). She adds that years of oppression added to the living conditions the hostel dwellers accepted as being unalterable, even when presented with possible alternatives to improve their quality of life.

The research Mamphela Ramphele conducted while writing *A Bed Called Home* drained her mentally and emotionally. While she considers the experience to be invaluable, she also writes that

> The demands of fieldwork were exacerbated by the horrible conditions in which people lived. I became physically ill at the end of 1987 from sheer exhaustion and anger at the dehumanizing conditions of the hostels where I spent about three months observing the daily lives of the hostel dwellers . . . one's psyche takes punishment under such conditions (*Across Boundaries* 168).

Nonetheless, Ramphele made productive use of her time studying migrant labor hostels in Cape Town in spite of the trauma she experienced mentally which caused her physical state to decline.

In her introduction to *A Bed Called Home*, Ramphele defines the sociological context of the inhabitants of the hostels who were greatly influenced by apartheid. She explains that in living in such substandard conditions, "Empowerment expands the limits of parameters in the constant calculations people make, which determine their ultimate choices about altering their positions in life" (11-12). The high level of unemployment and the overcrowded apartments of the hostels severely limit the possibility for intellectual stimulation and a quality of education that would encourage its residents to challenge authorities to improve their living conditions. Ramphele observes that if space constraints were not enough, the noise level is "overwhelming" and adds that "there is no quiet moment during which one can gather one's thoughts in peace. Withdrawal from the constant noise and intense human presence is impossible within the confines of this physical space. The fact that some semblance of human community is possible in such an environment is remarkable and a tribute to human ingenuity" (38). While Ramphele's observations are on one hand complimentary, they are also an indication of the lack of a quality of life that often accompanies a denial of basic human rights.

Another major human rights violation in the hostels is rampant domestic violence against women, influenced by the high unemployment and alcoholism of their male partners. Ramphele reports that, "A man is free to assault his female partner as long as he does not disturb the peace. Some men take their partners to the open veld where they assault them without falling foul of the disciplinary code" (81). While the sanctioning of domestic violence in the hostels is disturbing at best, it is unfortunately reflective of a greater South African cultural ideology regarding violence against women. Statistical research conducted on post-apartheid populations indicates that "One in five men and one in ten women agreed 'it is sometimes necessary for a partner to hit his wife'" (Theissen 214). Such acceptable beliefs of abusive behavior cause conditions under which

women are not only in a constant position for potentially traumatic occurrences but are subject to near impossible hope in the improvement of their quality of life.

Ramphele conducts a case study of one young woman, Zoliswa, who admits to a poverty-stricken childhood and subsequent unhappy marriage to a man who drinks excessively in addition to physically and sexually abusing her. This case particularly interested Ramphele; Zoliswa is an example of a woman who overcame obstacles to provide for some positive aspects of her life in spite of her situation:

> Zoliswa is a 39-year-old woman who recently qualified as a healer . . . She dropped out of school in Standard 4, because of lack of family support and fatigue from domestic chores. From that time on she developed headaches and sore throats which defied diagnosis and treatment by biomedical doctors . . . She has now found inner peace, which enables her to tolerate her husband's problems. The income she derives from her practice also affords her independence (48).

Zoliswa's story represents the potential of hostel dwellers, even in near-impossible conditions, to improve their quality of life even if only in small ways. In addition to the mental and emotional stability afforded to Zoliswa in her new occupation Ramphele reports that, "her life circumstances have changed somewhat, but of greatest importance is the confidence she now has to face those aspects which cannot change without her being overwhelmed by them" (49). An additional aspect which secures her peace of mind is the financial independence which further empowers her to be less dependent on her abuser. Ramphele is careful to include the financial aspect of Zoliswa's evolution in her description because of its significance in the change in mentality which takes place within Zoliswa's environment as a result. Because of her involvement in South Africa's Civil Rights Movement, Ramphele is acutely aware of the political advantages that accompany financial empowerment. The same effect holds true even on a small scale because of the impact such social influence can have over other hostel dwellers, especially the women.

Zoliswa's testimony places Ramphele in the position of a witness to a potentially traumatic situation which she then attempts to objectively incorporate into her dissertation. Such an objectivity is nearly impossible to achieve, for as Dori Laub observes,

> By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his [sic] very listening, he [sic] comes to partially experience trauma himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread, and conflicts that the trauma victim feels. He has to address all these, if he is to carry out his function as a listener, and if trauma is to emerge, so that its henceforth impossible witnessing can indeed take place. The listener, therefore, by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past. The listener has to feel the victim's victories, defeats, and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony (57-58).

Because of the trauma Ramphele both experiences through the deaths of her loved ones and witnesses through her medical practice, the stories of abuse throughout her field work in the hostels places her in a position of listener/witness to acts of violence which she internalizes. The physical breakdown she describes is her body's reaction to listening to testimonies of violent acts which she then incorporates into both her dissertation and her memoir. Because black South Africans, regardless of social class, all had to collectively adhere to apartheid's regulations designed to suppress them, internalization of the witnesses' testimonies was natural to Ramphele as an extension of her own experiences of injustice.

Zoliswa's story resonates with Ramphele both professionally and socially. As a "healer," Zoliswa offers her services to avail the well being of the community. Likewise, Ramphele practiced formal medicine in several community health centers before transitioning into anthropological research. The kinship the two formed as a result of the stories of healing from a victim of domestic violence (Zoliswa) to witness (Ramphele) shifted as Ramphele reminisced over episodes in her life where she was the victim of violence within the Black Consciousness Movement and recalls those events to the reader of her memoir, who in turn becomes the witness. Ramphele also realizes the significance of economic empowerment based on gender for

Zoliswa, and in the later chapters of *Across Boundaries* writes extensively about the pride she takes in being the sole provider for her two sons based on the quality of life she has acquired based on her education and career. Ramphele highlights the gendered aspects of Zoliswa's story because they are so similar to her own experiences.

As a medical practitioner, Mamphela Ramphele was instinctively drawn to issues of health care within the hostels. Because of a lack of adequate modern health facilities, many hostel dwellers rely on traditional faith healers such as Zoliswa to cure their illnesses. Quality modern health care is a human right that is rarely met within the hostel system for a number of reasons. One is that consultation time with a medical professional is limited to less than six minutes per patient at hospitals in some areas. Another obstacle is lack of transportation (taxi fare is expensive) and communication (only four working telephones were accessible in the hostel during the time of Ramphele's study). What is most demoralizing is the reluctance of trained physicians and ambulance staff to enter the hostels, "particularly during periods of heightened township violence" when "the safety of health workers cannot be guaranteed" (*A Bed Called Home* 44). Thus a potential for curable disease decreases which further jeopardizes the health, quality of life, and overall human rights of the hostel residents.

The trauma Ramphele experiences while conducting anthropological research in Cape Town is exacerbated by working under substandard healthcare conditions earlier in her life as a medical doctor and political activist. Ramphele is able to draw upon similar experiences she has had earlier in her career as a medical doctor serving in rural areas and apply those strategies to the migrant population in her anthropological study. Just as with the traditional faith healers common in the hostels, the rural women in her earlier life and prior profession prepare her for the interaction she would have with believers of traditional medicine in the hostels:

> I learned a great deal about local beliefs, explanations of the causes of disease, indigenous

> healing methods, and many other things . . . I expressed my respect for their diagnostic skills before suggesting a change in the method of treatment. In this way, the old women healers responsible for traditional treatment were not made to feel stupid, but affirmed in their astuteness at having made the correct observations—which was a sound basis for introducing innovations (*Across Boundaries* 139).

Ramphele was fortunate to have the ability to build upon prior experiences with traditional medicine practitioners while negotiating her multi-layered role in the hostels. She realized that her ability to empower the local population strengthened her relationship with them and provided the basis she needed to be effective. The significance of empowering the people, however, has obvious benefits beyond the ability of Ramphele to be an efficient physician or researcher, as her further observations indicate:

> The capacity of the poor to engage effectively in the development process and to use substantial resources has been found to be extremely limited. The most devastating impact of apartheid on poor black South Africans has been the destruction of people's faith in themselves as agents of history. Their life experiences are scarred by survival strategies which destroy trust and faith in their fellow human beings. Moreover, their dealings with development agencies have in many cases merely reinforced their mistrust of systems and their fellow human beings (*Across Boundaries* 212).

As Ramphele comes to realize this level of apathy among the hostel residents and of its historical roots, she acknowledges the reasons behind the systematic violation of human rights experienced by all South Africans, but especially those of lower economic status. Her student political activism which in many ways continued into her adult life lends itself to her goal of improving post-apartheid living conditions on both a local and national level.

Alcoholism and its potential damage to one's internal organs are major health issues faced by hostel dwellers and inevitably has a negative effect on male-female relationships as well. However, the availability of alcohol is a double-edged sword. While thirteen percent of the participants in Ramphele's study showed signs of liver damage related to alcoholism, a much larger population of women would be completely destitute were it not for their ability to brew and sell alcohol as a means of survival (54). Ramphele notes that the Alcoholics Anonymous Association expressed a willingness to provide intervention to the hostel population, however,

"Limited access to therapy in this case would be related to a lack of telephones, language difficulties and problems with means of transport to meetings, which are an important part of the therapeutic process" (55). Such an economic dependence on a physically damaging substance is an indication of the apartheid regime's lack of interest in the well being of its predominantly black population.

Mamphela Ramphele writes extensively in *A Bed Called Home* of the patriarchal power relations that exist between men and women in the hostels. Her interpretation of women's overall submissive behavior is that it is driven by an economic dependence on men. Among the unfortunate effects of this structure is that "the equating of subordination with pleasure [of one's spouse] inhibits personal development and self-respect. Many women adopt a submissive role as a strategy to ensure their stay, especially in those situations where they have come in desperation after a period of neglect and irregular remittances" (76). Ramphele describes an unfortunate cycle of "mutual abuse" between men and women to this end with men having the convenience of a "domestic slave" to attend to their practical and physical needs and women who rely on their partner's income for survival. One of the more dangerous consequences of this dynamic of social relations is that women have limited options to combat domestic violence and often choose to endure abuse for the sake of ensuring accommodations for themselves and their children. This patriarchal familial structure is an example of a colonized population that tends to take on the behavior of the colonizer. Ruth Leys writes in *Trauma* that, "The process of imitation or identification with the aggressor—the mimetic acceptance of unpleasure, including the incorporation or introjection of the aggressor's guilt—held the key to the victim's split or fragmented mental state" (125). Women who live in the hostels are victims of the men's

imitation of the political system that oppresses them. The men in turn are tempted to respond to the injustices of the system by treating women violently.

Further danger of the cycle of abuse—in addition to the near impossibility of breaking the cycle for the next generation—is that social law is constructed around it in ways that deny women human rights. In governmental structures and enforcement of civil law within the hostel communities, women are prohibited from making complaints of violations against men and requesting punishment from perpetrators. The rationale for this discrepancy is that

> Women are not recognised as persons in this system of justice, except in their capacity as complainants in relation to their husbands or boyfriends. They are not eligible to participate in the hearings, and some men do not even bother to address them about matters in dispute. Women are deemed to be the extensions of their menfolk, who are held accountable for their offences. This 'non-person' status is a source of distress for many women, who feel abused by some of the men (61).

Fostering healthy relationships in light of this power structure is challenging for both men and women. The residue of apartheid is no more evident than in the damage it has caused in social relationships and the lack of humanity with which black South Africans in migrant hostels are inclined to treat each other.

Mamphela Ramphele identifies herself as a participant observer in the hostel system and elaborates on her influence among the residents as well as the ways in which the environment affects her sense of justice and human rights. Ramphele writes that, "My entry into the hostels as a researcher-facilitator had a considerable impact on the social processes within them" (108). The hostel dwellers called upon Ramphele for guidance in improving their housing dilemmas and overall living conditions. Ramphele reports, however, that her presence and genuine interest in their lives inspired hope among them in their desperate situation:

> The denial of full urban citizenship to hostel dwellers as represented by their living circumstances underlies the symbolic importance of my taking an interest in their lives. They needed to be respected as people to compensate for their treatment as labour units by employers and government agencies. The perceived lack of respect and indifference to their rights by township residents were an added denigration (*A Bed Called Home* 108-109).

Ramphele's mere presence influenced other improvements in the mentalities of the residents. One of the most important is the potentially increased respect the male dwellers may have had for their female counterparts as a result of the deference Mamphela Ramphele commanded while conducting her study. Ramphele reports that, for example, while meeting with the all-male Hostel Dwellers' Association she was served tea by the men not only because she was a visitor, but also because her title as a researcher and medical doctor warranted such hospitality; women are required normally to make their own tea (109). However, the presence of an outsider may have had the opposite effect. Ramphele describes her presence at the hostels as one of "honorary male" (109). She did not fit into the traditional parameters of the rest of the women, so the men were forced into creating a new means of interacting with her. This new definition worked to her advantage for the purposes of her research in that the men were willing to reveal their concerns and frustrations to her: "My honorary male status enabled male hostel dwellers to continue to function within a symbolic framework over which they retained control. They could thus talk about women as being childish and incapable of rational long-term planning without feeling that they were offending me personally" (109). Ramphele as a result was able to collect data that was much richer and to depict an illustration of life in the hostels that was more vivid than she would have without such a strong participant-observer presence.

Ramphele's presence had a positive influence on the women as well. As Ramphele interacted with both men and women, they began to see her as more of a person and less of a "demi-god" because of her professional status (110). However, she was especially inspirational to the women because her presence was "essential to the process of opening up ideological and political space, and enabling people to contemplate crossing boundaries they previously thought uncrossable" (115). Just as Ramphele became a witness to their testimonies of the unbearable

living conditions they were subjected to, the women were able to reciprocally witness the living inspiration she provided as someone of their same gender and nationality who was enjoying a successful professional life.

However, Ramphele also acknowledges that in her participant-observer status she was at times called upon to be more of a participant than an observer. An example is that she became "a fundraiser and an official public relations person for them," which eventually caused tension when she expressed opposing views to those of the leaders of the Hostel Dwellers' Association (118). They eventually used her status against her by accusing her of being an elitist and an educated person who did not understand the concerns of the working class and who merely patronized them. Ramphele was shocked at these accusations, but was reminded of her outsider status and learned how fragile the level of trust was between her and the hostel dwellers. Perhaps one of the most important methodological lessons she learned during episodes of opposing viewpoints was to "acknowledge the existence of this inequality rather than to pretend to be 'part of the people'" (120).

More specific to the source of Ramphele's memories of witnessing human rights violations is the intersection of colonialism and feminist theory, which is intrinsically tied to human rights for women in the global South and especially post-apartheid South Africa. Within patriarchal forms of government, women are often denied civil rights such as equal access to employment, property, or education, which could potentially lead to trauma. Childs and Williams write that

> Feminist and post-colonial theory have much in common as oppositional discourses which attempt to redress an imbalance in society and culture. Both began with strategies that aimed to upset dominant hierarchies and recover or reassert marginalized histories and writings . . . the complexity of colonial discourse has to be reasserted as intersecting discourses of class, gender, religion, nation, sexuality, and 'race' position (198-199).

Inclusion of the ways in which women's human rights are affected by apartheid in particular must also be considered in light of their significance for Ramphele's writing process. There is a danger in assuming that women are denied exactly the same human rights as men just as there is danger in assuming that human rights under apartheid can be as easily achieved as within other forms of government. Wole Soyinka states in an interview that

> I think that, generally speaking, women need to be much more protected, and it is here that the sin of cultural relativism rears its head . . . It is sometimes said, even in international forums, that cultural relativism must take precedence over human rights. I believe that human rights are absolute and that there is only one humanity. However, we find that within cultures that claim to have a specific right to violate human rights, there are forces of discord and resistance (47).

Soyinka makes a crucial connection here between women's safety, human rights, cultural relativism, and globalization. As patriarchal societies attempt to enter the global market, they must consider their diplomatic relationships. South Africa's economy has suffered greatly as a result of businesses in the West who were not willing to support a colonizing form of government: "The situation in Africa is more throbbing. One wonders why, since the world economic system succeeded in assuring economic takeoff and sometimes development in many Third World countries . . . while 'non-development' seems to have become mostly an exclusively African phenomenon" (Kodjo 71). Businesses often have little interest in investing in countries which do not value human rights. More specifically, companies are increasingly aware of their consumers' concern over industries which do not exploit their human resources. The backlash Edem Kodjo suggests is evident in what he terms "non-development." It is widely known that women commonly suffer more in the globalized economy resulting from the exploitation of their labor. This exploitation itself is predicated upon the idea that women work under conditions that violate their human rights. Mwayila Tshiyembe writes of the effects of the globalized economy specifically on African nations that "Globalization is simultaneously a threat

and an opportunity. It is a threat because globalization is a process of establishing domain . . . This prospect is likely, if one doesn't pay attention, to reduce other civilizations to the role of simple dispensaries of consumption of the dominant Western model and of its pervert features: frantic individualism, aggravation of inequities, increasing poverty" (190). Various regions within Africa have already been affected by an economy of exporting its resources instead of capitalizing from its own riches. As this major transition destabilizes the economically powerful nations, it also influences the apartheid regime which began to deteriorate near the end of the twentieth century. This concept of the effects of globalization specifically in South Africa can also apply to the predicament of a globalized economy on its population of women. However, a slowly strengthening political system may eventually improve economic conditions for women especially. Christa Wichterich writes that, "In South Africa, after the end of the apartheid regime, a 25 per cent quota helped women to force their way into the male reserve of parliament and to take part in the drafting of a new constitution" (159-160). While the post-apartheid economy has continued to struggle for advancement within a globalized economy, socioeconomic conditions for women simultaneously continue to have an effect on South Africa's overall population.

Soyinka's reference to "discord and resistance" truly existed during the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, however Mamphela Ramphele expresses views of feminism that are in some ways surprising and in other ways consistent with the image of second-wave feminism presented by the West. She describes her early impression of feminism by writing

> Feminism, which was then sweeping through the USA, had very little impact with BC [Black Consciousness] ranks or on my own personal journey at that stage. This was partly because of lack of access to the relevant literature, on account of censorship, but also because feminism was seen as irrelevant to the needs of blacks in South Africa. The feminist movement was dismissed as a 'bra-burning' indulgence of bored, rich white Americans. My own path towards liberation as a woman would take a different route. ("The Dynamics of Gender" 221).

Ramphele admits to her limited accessibility to the literature of the American Women's Rights Movement, however she also realizes that traditional feminism at face value was not consistent with the mission of the Black Consciousness Movement. Human rights issues in South Africa were not analogous to rights for women in the United States and many countries in the West during this time period.

Still, the patriarchal value system in which Mamphela Ramphele lived caused her to struggle against beliefs of traditional roles at the same time that she questioned those roles. In speaking indirectly of herself, Ramphele describes her leadership role in the Black Consciousness Movement as follows: "Challenges to male privilege did not represent a systematic departure from traditional gender relationships, but only served to undermine this tradition for the benefit of those who were prepared to take risks in challenging sexism at a personal level" ("The Dynamics of Gender" 220). Ramphele recalls additional episodes to exemplify her conflicting ideologies about gender roles, including the following in which she outlines the necessity of transforming traditional views of gender in order to achieve greater advancements in the Movement:

> Desmond Tutu, then recently appointed general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, remarked during a visit to Zanempilo Community Health Centre [of which Ramphele was Chief Medical Officer] on the absurdity of holding on to notions of traditional gender roles. A lively debate followed after supper, with Tutu relating his experiences in London and the joy of participating in all the domestic chores, including nappy [diaper] washing! That was a difficult one to swallow for a community so used to traditional gender roles. He had few, if any, converts by the time he left the following morning ("The Dynamics of Gender" 219).

While Ramphele staunchly advocates for gender equality among her colleagues in the Black Consciousness Movement at times, she is also torn in other situations over the rare male defiance of traditional roles, as the following example illustrates:

> It was not just a matter of men being reluctant to share in domestic chores; *we as women activists* were also uncomfortable about fundamental change in stereotypical gender roles. I remember arguing one day with Father Aelred Stubbs, a member of the Community of Resurrection who used to visit Zanempilo quite often to see Steve Biko, about his insistence

> on helping me wash up after supper. Although I resented the fact that my peers would not lend me a hand, I felt uncomfortable about a man nearly old enough to be my father, washing up with me. It was as if I was being disrespectful towards him by allowing him to help me. But he just pressed on regardless of my protests ("The Dynamics of Gender" 219 italics mine).

This illustration suggests that Ramphele was hesitant to accept assistance from Father Stubbs because of his age rather than his gender. However, she also prefaces the example by admitting to her own gender bias, even as she locates her position within the collective of herself along with other female activists. Such an admission is an indication of ingrained social values inherent in the patriarchal aspects of the colonizing nature of the apartheid system.

Gender bias within a movement to advance the rights of people of color is not isolated to members of the South African Black Consciousness Movement, however. The Black Panther Movement in the United States—of which the climax is chronologically aligned with the height of the Black Consciousness Movement—was inspired by its predecessor, the Civil Rights Movement. The Women's Rights Movement that chronologically spanned between the two raised questions of identity and race for participants in both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. In her autobiography *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*, former Black Panther Elaine Brown summarizes the plight of the women in leadership roles within her area of political activism by writing

> A woman in the Black Power movement [sic] was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the 'counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches.' It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people (357).

Mamphela Ramphele felt a comradeship with both male and female members of the movement alike. However, her own perception of societal expectations of the unequal treatment of women conflicted with the movement's overarching mission of justice. Each of these movements

attempted to bring about changes in social climate and increase the rights of black people, however women were often caught in the crossfire of where their allegiance should lie.

Further indication of the psychological influence of patriarchy is evidenced in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Women's human rights were as much of an issue in the TRC hearings as they were during Mamphela Ramphele's medical practice. The TRC testimonies required an element of not only testimony but also witness—the commission itself. In many cases those who testified were survivors themselves who had witnessed. Victims of the apartheid system who testified against human rights violators re-lived the trauma though testifying that was similar to the writing process of Ramphele as a witness to the human rights abuses she writes about in her memoir. Ramphele reminds her readers that, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has provided a partial picture of what happened to the oppressors, but we also need to look at what happened to the oppressed. The same process that degraded the morality of the oppressors has had an impact on those who are oppressed" ("Law, Corruption and Morality" 173).

Patriarchal ideology played a major role in the content of the witnesses' testimonies. Since the majority of testimonies were given by women whose husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons were imprisoned, the women who testified felt an allegiance to the men whose stories they told and whom they sought justice for, but they were torn also because they felt they were dishonoring the family by revealing private details of family life. Alex Boraine, former Vice-Chair of the TRC, notes that "More women came to the Commission than men . . . The violence of the past had clearly resulted in the deaths of more men than women . . . women played down their suffering and spoke about that of their families. Many women had suffered in their own right, having been detained without trial, harassed, assaulted, insulted, raped, and tortured"

(115). Because of patriarchal structures women were conditioned to allow the men's stories to take precedence over their own, even in cases where their own experiences were just as brutal.

Still many of the women expressed a feeling of empowerment upon offering their testimonies to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mapetla Mohapi's wife Nohle, for example, was made to feel as if she was annoying the authorities for the nearly 20 years since her husband's death in detention which was ruled as a suicide but that she and many others believed was an assassination. Mohapi was a victim of Section 6 of the Terrorism Act of 1967, which stipulated that "solitary confinement in conditions where only the security police had access to a detained person; no lawyer, friend, or relative could have access to a detainee for an indefinite period" (Ntsebeza 160). Mamphela Ramphele incorporates the Mohapis' story into her memoir, thus memorializing a fellow activist and providing examples of the violent elements of apartheid simultaneously (*Across Boundaries* 111-112). Dumisa Ntsebeza, a member of the Commission, writes that Nohle Mohapi did not believe any justice to her husband's death had been attempted for years until she was given the opportunity to testify at the Commission's hearings:

> Nineteen years later, after the very first TRC hearings with her, she told the media that she finally felt relieved. The TRC environment had been friendly. For the first time, she felt dignified and honored because she was testifying before people who had seemed to believe her, which was a new experience ("The Uses of Truth Commissions" 160).

Alex Boraine recalls in his documentation of the TRC hearings the environment of comfort and trust that he attempted to establish between the Commission and those who testified. He notes that Nohle Mohapi's testimony on the first day of the proceedings was the first to be heard. After Mohapi took her oath, Boraine set a precedent for the atmosphere he wished to create by introducing her as follows:

> In welcoming you as the first witness in the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission we are mindful of the *suffering* that you have endured in the past. Many of us *remember* as though it was yesterday when Mapetla died in police custody. We remember the anguish and horror of those days and we know also, apart from the personal grief that you have experienced, that you yourself have been a *victim of human rights violations*. We

> know that you too have been detained and were in solitary confinement and we salute you as someone of great courage. We thank you for coming here today. This is a testimony to your commitment, to truth, to justice, to reconciliation and to peace between you and all people and all South Africa (98 italics mine).

In his welcome address, Boraine acknowledges Mohapi's symbolic representation before the Commission in a number of ways. He first recognizes Mapetla Mohapi and suggests that many South Africans shared her grief collectively. He also prepares Mohapi for the potential trauma she may experience through offering her testimony. More importantly, Boraine acknowledges that Mohapi was herself the victim of acts of violence separate from those of witnessing the violence and injustice committed against her husband. He ends his welcome with an expression of gratitude for her willingness to testify and notes that her act of bravery should signify an attempt to unify the dividing cultures among South Africans. In so doing, Boraine sets the tone for acknowledging the humanity of the victims and the necessity to hear their testimonies. He also creates an environment that causes the witnesses to believe their testimonies will be heard in earnest and with sincerity. Such an atmosphere is necessary because, as Boraine reports later in his text, "We were concerned that the victim hearings should not involve additional trauma for those appearing . . . we wanted to do everything possible to protect victims already faced with the enormous pressure of reliving past atrocities" (111-112). Of course, as many examples throughout the TRC proceedings and Mamphela Ramphele's memoir demonstrate, revisiting acts of violence and human rights violations almost inevitably forces the witness to re-live the trauma as well. The possibility for re-creating memory as a site of trauma is intensified for the victims, however, considering that the sole purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings is to uncover the realities of unjust acts committed against South Africans during the apartheid regime. The witnesses, fully aware that they would be called to testify, may or may not be fully aware of the psychological and emotional effect their testimonies will have on themselves or the commission.

Descriptions of some of the witnesses vividly illustrate the deep-seated nature of their trauma. Beatrice Sethwale, mother of a black police officer who was murdered as a result of his assumed support of apartheid, testified by saying

> I feel I am already dead and that this process will be a very long and time-consuming one. It will take a lot of effort to make me entirely normal again because I've actually become quite used to my pain and place where I find myself currently. I don't bear any grudges against anybody. But if you lose your confidence and your faith in other people, it is very hard to restore. My faith in my fellow human beings has been shattered . . . (Ntsebeza, "A Lot to Live For" 106).

Sethwale's statement is consistent with the ongoing nature of trauma that women often experience in the global South. The pain she has experienced with the death of her son has caused her to lose her belief in the good of mankind and worse has caused her to lose her will to live. This is one of the more common effects of trauma.

Some of the more powerful testimonies were truly "unspeakable." A hollowing cry came from Nomonde Calata, whose husband Fort Calata was a member of the Cradock Four and was brutally murdered in the Eastern Cape as late as 1984. She broke down in a way that Boraine describes as follows:

> The primeval and spontaneous wail from the depths of her soul was carried live on radio and television, not only throughout South Africa but to other parts of the world. It was a cry from the soul that transformed the hearings from a litany of suffering and pain to an even deeper level. It caught up in a single howl all the darkness and horror of the apartheid years. It was as if she enshrined in the throwing back of her body and letting out the cry the collective horror of the thousands of people who had been trapped in racism and oppression for so long (102).

The level of pain exemplified by Calata's cry is more of a testament to the inarticulable nature of trauma than any words Calata could have spoken during her testimony. Ruth Leys writes of this unspeakable nature of trauma that, "Victims of trauma cannot witness or testify to the trauma in the sense of narrate and represent it to themselves and others: all they can do is perform the experience as if it were literally happening all over again" (252). The powerful expression of pain in Calata's cry affected its listeners in a way that forever influenced their beliefs on the severity of the effects of apartheid and the necessity of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission. Antjie Krog, at the time a reporter for the South African Broadcasting Corporation, was present along with Boraine at Calata's hearing. Krog's recollection of the event in *Country of My Skull* resonates with Boraine's: "For me, this crying is the beginning of the Truth Commission—the signature tune, the definitive moment, the ultimate sound of what the process is about . . . she threw herself backwards and that sound . . . that sound . . . it will haunt me forever" (57). In Krog stating that this episode in the proceedings was a defining moment with long-term effects, she is locating herself in the process as a witness to pain as she internalizes the trauma of the victim. While the spoken words within Calata's testimony were recorded by the staff of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and by all media representatives present, the part of the testimony that could not be recorded spoke volumes beyond any verbal articulation the victim could have possibly expressed.

Krog is so affected, in fact, by the graphic nature and delivery of Nomonde Calata's testimony that she is unable to determine the reasons for her choice to refer to the victim in formal terms: "Two days after Mrs. Calata—why do I call her this now, when we've talked the whole time about Nomonde? Is it the horror of her testimony that has distanced her from me or do I simply feel humbled?" (58). Krog consciously decides to refer to Calata more formally resulting from the trauma she may have internalized based on her interaction with Calata and then wished to deny. Felman describes this phenomenon by quoting Camus: "'One takes a distance from the real by wanting to consider history as a totality sufficient unto itself.' It is only at the price of this denial of the real that history can be considered as a self-contained whole with no referential residue and whose every aspect is entirely subsumed by its own transparent intelligibility" (174). Krog resists internalizing Calata's story yet is still devastated by it. She suffers a form of trauma common to victims of the witness who are influenced by testimony even

without witnessing the event firsthand. Calata made the suffering of victims of apartheid "real" to Krog in ways that before had only been based on fact and history. The internal lives of apartheid victims were presented on a world stage in ways that would not have been possible without the TRC hearings. As mentioned in Chapter One, Toni Morrison attempts in the fictional *Beloved* to capture the aesthetic nature of Margaret Garner's experience of trauma in ways that would not be possible in Steven Weisenburger's historical account of the same event.

Also in question during the commission's hearings is the validity of the testimonies based on whether or not those who had been traumatized were in any condition to accurately recall events. Such an accusation is common among marginalized people whose testimonies require translation as is exemplified by the highly controversial *testimonio* of Rigoberta Menchu. Carol Smith analyzes controversy over the Menchu testimony within a larger global context which may be helpful in evaluating the TRC'S response to some of the more graphic testimonies. Smith writes that

> In the world of human rights activism, journalism, and scholarship, a 'new standard of truth' . . . is forcing Westerners to cede authority to the non-Western subaltern and to local witnesses . . . and thus to support those who are invariably apologists for one side or another in situations that cannot be reduced to two sides. Created under the influence of multiculturalism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism, this new criterion for veracity has discredited 'objective' portrayals of complex situations (143).

Responding to Nomonde Calata's testimony with disbelief is thus not an isolated event. It is instead common within the analysis of marginalized people and their depiction of injustice including acts of violence. Smith inadvertently addresses the potential for exploitation of the hearings by the West and the backlash it may have had as well considering the voyeuristic nature the media tends to promote.

Antjie Krog includes in her narrative the extent to which participants in the hearings other than the commissioners and testifiers were affected by witnessing the events, including herself as a member of the media. In addition to depicting the culture that the members of the

media formed around each other, Krog reports the psychological toll of one of the interpreters for the hearings. Without naming the affected individual, she reports in her interview with him of his experience of recalling the testimonies in the first person: “It is difficult to interpret victim hearings because you use the first person all the time. I have no distance when I say ‘I’ . . . It runs through me with ‘I’ . . . After the first three months of hearings, my wife and baby left me because of my violent outbursts. The Truth Commission advised me to stop. But I don’t want to. This is my history, and I want to be a part of it—until the end” (Krog 169). The interpreter witnessed the effects of trauma through interpreting the events from one language into another, both of which he had some level of intimacy. He further internalized the testimonies of the victims by using the first person in his interpretation. His subconscious (or perhaps quite conscious) internalizing of the acts of violence of the victims of apartheid forced him to act in ways that he was unable to articulate verbally. He therefore reacted physically by being given to violent outbursts that ultimately destroyed his home life. Undeniably—“unspeakably”—the interpreter’s identity was influenced by his sense of injustice as well as the lived experiences of the apartheid victims. Similarly, the internalization of the “I” of the self is significant in Mamphela Ramphele’s memoir as well. She invites the reader-as-witness to experience the multiple layers of trauma as she does through her first-person narrative. Ramphele embodies the injustices of apartheid through all she witnesses, including violence and inadequate health care, and she adapts it as her own as she incorporates the stories into her narrative.

Krog also reports on many of the testimonies presented to the Commission with an extensive section dedicated to women’s testimonies. She contextualizes the mentalities of the people who suffered under apartheid by referring to Commissioner Mary Burton’s observation:

"'In a normal society, if your child is not at home on time, you think he might still be at his friend's. But under apartheid, you go and look at the police station, then at the jails, then at the hospital, and eventually at the morgue'" (60). The severity of such injustice has the potential to distort notions of what constitutes human rights and a sense of safety in one's day-to-day life. This includes normalizing the imprisonment and rape of women to the extent that physical violation appears to not be quite as tragic as it is. Moreover, the passage of time caused many of the rape crimes to not be heard. Krog reports that, "Apparently high-profile women, among them Cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, and businesswomen, were raped and sexually abused under previous dispensation—and not only by the regime, but by their own comrades in the townships and liberation camps. But no one will utter an audible word about it" (239). Part of the reason results from the unspeakable nature of trauma, however the other possibility is a sense of loss articulated by clinical psychologist Nomfundo Walaza: " 'Women who have been raped know that if they talk about it now in public, they will lose something again—privacy, maybe respect . . . some of the rapists hold high political positions today—so if you spoke out you would not only undermine the new government you fought for, but destroy your own possibilities of a future'" (240). Once again, the very practical nature of refusing to testify to the violation causes the resulting trauma to manifest itself in the individual's experience of pain.

Also, the Truth Commission was faced with the disturbing dilemma of whether or not to grant amnesty for rape convictions. The commission decided that in almost all cases, amnesty for rape would be denied. In light of this fact, Krog was surprised at the number of testimonials admitting to rape and wondered why individuals would even bother, knowing that their possibility for amnesty was limited. A partially justifiable answer can be found in the overall mentality of the double standard existing between the treatment of male and female prisoners: "A

man who didn't break under torture was respected by the police . . . But a woman's refusal to bow down would unleash the wrath of the torturers. Because in their own discourse a woman, a black *meid* [woman], a *kaffermeid* at that, had no right to have the strength to withstand them" (236). Even more disturbing along the same lines was the belief that women could not possibly be interested in liberation or political activism out of sincerity but instead that their only interest in the revolution was to "service the men." Krog, quoting Thenjiwe Mthintso, the Gender Commission chairperson responsible for special women's hearings, observes that, "Banning orders for women were also handled differently. 'Women were constantly peeped at and preyed on. They wanted to prove that you were a whore . . . To tell you, 'You are not a revolutionary, you are a black bitch on heat'" (236). Such a double standard not only justified the rape crimes in the minds of many, but also compromised the integrity of the women's sincerity and underminded their level of intelligence as effective political activists in the struggle against the apartheid regime. To this end, Mamphela Ramphele addresses these issues extensively in her own writing about her position and that of her women colleagues in the Black Consciousness Movement. She even hints in her memoir at the unequal treatment of the women prisoners during her incarceration.

However, some women were brave enough to testify to the commission, even though they knew they would be forced to relive the experiences through articulating their testimonies. Many of the more graphic crimes against women occurred during detainment and imprisonment. A particularly horrific example was presented by Rita Mazibuko, a spy who was suspected of working for the apartheid regime, upon which Krog reports that "Neither she nor the Truth Commission is prepared for the storm that follows her testimony" (240):

> On the day I was taken out of that hole [where she had slept for six months], they said I should go and wash. The clothes I was wearing at the time was the same dress for about six months . . . When I washed my hair, it fell out; my skin was greasy because I didn't wash for three months . . .

> I refused to have sex with them [two of her comrades]. Then they tortured me between two chairs. I fell to the ground. They were kicking me across my face, they treated me like a donkey . . . They pushed a pipe with a condom in and out of my vagina . . . After being assaulted, I was bleeding from my mouth and nose, but still I was hanged, left dangling from a tree—they wanted to kill me that day. I was made to wear overalls so that if I messed myself up, they wouldn't catch sight of my mess. When they brought me down, they said: 'This dog is dead' (241).

From the facility in which these atrocities occurred, Mazibuko was taken to Sun City prison where she reports more specifically of rape crimes she was forced to endure:

> At Sun City prison, someone named Desmond raped me nine times. Nine times. He is quite a young man—he was twenty-nine at the time. And I saw myself as his mother. Comrade Mashego was staying in Swaziland—when I met him, he raped me until I approached the authorities. And then Tebogo, who was also very young, he raped me and cut my genitals—he cut me through from number one to number two. And then he put me in a certain room, he tied my legs apart. He tied my neck and then poured Dettol [an antiseptic] over my genitals (241).

Instead of evoking any sense of passion, Mazibuko instead inspired skepticism among the commissioners to whom she testified. There are several possibilities for this reaction. One is that by the time of Mazibuko's testimony the commission had been desensitized to the graphic nature of testimonies prior to Mazibuko's. Dori Laub writes that, "We endow the survivor with a kind of sanctity, both to pay our tribute to him [sic] and to keep him at a distance, to avoid the intimacy entailed in knowing" (72). The other possibility is that the details of the testimony were so graphic that the commission did not *want* to believe that human beings could act so maliciously toward each other. Shoshana Felman writes of a similar phenomenon amongst populations that lived through the Holocaust:

> The Plague (the Holocaust) is disbelieved because it does not enter, and cannot be framed by, any existing frame of reference (be it of knowledge or disbelief). Because our perception of reality is molded by frames of reference, what is outside them, however imminent and otherwise conspicuous, remains historically invisible, unreal, and can only be encountered by a systematic disbelief (103).

The Truth Commission was potentially unwilling to believe Mazibuko's testimony because of the sheer horror of surviving such violent acts. Their unwillingness is also perhaps fueled by anger over the injustice of being subject to such a deliberate violation of human rights.

Rape was in fact a very common form of torture for women among the imprisoned political activists. Mthintso opened her special session on women's hearings by setting a precedent with the following observations:

> As women speak, they speak for us who are too cowardly to speak. They speak for us who are too owned by pain to speak. Because always, always in anger and frustration, men use women's bodies as a terrain of struggle—as a battleground. Behind every woman's encounter with the Security Branch and the police lurked the possibility of sexual abuse and rape (Krog 235).

Krog reports that the women lived in constant fear when imprisoned because of the impending possibility and pervasiveness of violence against them. While it seems that Krog is making a romantic and symbolic statement about the beginning and end of the TRC hearings, there is actually more symbolism in her statement than she may be aware of: "The Truth Commission has come full circle in East London. It started here: the first hearings on human rights violations were held in the city hall of East London. Now, fifteen months later, it is ending here . . ." (248). Krog adds that these last hearings are specifically set aside for women's testimonies. However, the implication is that all the earlier hearings were of greater priority and deserved greater attention from both the media and the commission itself. Such a phenomenon is nothing new. Mary Geske and Susan Bourque report that "On 9 December 1999 Kofi Annan . . . announced an optional Protocol to the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW). The floor of the UN was sparsely populated. Only a few delegates—mostly women—attended the Secretary General's speech" (246). In the case of women's issues being addressed at the United Nations General Assembly, women's issues were last on the agenda signifying how little regard or possibly interest there was in hearing the women's stories. For a situation regarding similar issues to occur during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an indication that the state of women's human rights continues to be in jeopardy, particularly in patriarchal and colonized settings.

The efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the new African National Congress symbolically represented a change in public sentiment and the possibility of better living conditions for the South African people. It represented the efforts of a new government-sanctioned agency to acknowledge that injustice occurred and that the victims and witnesses who suffered human rights violations deserve to have their stories told. The Commission's report itself containing all testimonies and recommendations for reparation exemplifies questions raised by Dori Laub: "The literature of testimony puts into effect, puts into action a question of belonging. To whom do the dead belong? And consequently, on whose side must the living (the surviving) be?" (116-117). These questions were central in the minds of participants in the TRC hearings. The victims felt an allegiance to their lost family members, yet at the same time they believed in the possibility of justice for the loss they suffered. Mamphela Ramphele out of a desire to rectify a distortion of history caused by publicity of the loss of those close to her—including Steve Biko—felt the need to also document the details of her life through memoir.

Ramphele witnessed trauma throughout the stages of her career from practicing medicine to conducting research, both of which positioned her to interact closely with her brothers and sisters in local communities throughout apartheid-ridden South Africa. Although the apartheid regime has formally ended, the residual philosophy of colonialism remains. Alex Boraine writes that "the work of the Commission, which began the process of healing, and catharsis, needs to be continued by a much wider range of agencies with greater resources of people and time so that some of the trauma which still exists in the hearts and minds of many people in the country, black and white, can receive further healing and closure" (128). Researchers in trauma theory in addition to the memoirs and testimonies of those who have witnessed and experienced trauma themselves indicate that trauma is a constant state of existence, especially for those whose

human rights are constantly in jeopardy. While “healing and closure” are both possible for human beings who realize they are considered sub-human by people in various forms of societal control, achieving such aspirations is difficult when living conditions for the subjugated population have not yet changed.

South Africa has endured over a generation of the effects of colonialism and while the country has made great strides in improving the livelihoods of apartheid’s victims, there is still great social and economic progress to be made. Ronald Slye writes that establishing accountability for perpetrators of violence and creating a human rights culture is what will make the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission worthwhile (170). However, as Dorothy Shea notes, “Only with the passage of time can one begin to tackle issues associated with the TRC’s long-term societal impact” (55). This influence within society includes the effects of trauma revisited by those who testified at TRC hearings. Acknowledging the humanity of both victims and survivors of human rights violations will bring a sense of justice to black South Africans moreso than the individual testimonies themselves. This message of transformation in the social structure of South Africa resonates in Mamphela Ramphele’s address to the Business Partners Women’s Fund: “We do desperately need transformation, brought about by black empowerment . . . People, including women, have to empower themselves” (www. fin24.com).

Chapter Three: Mamphela Ramphele as a Witness of Trauma During Apartheid and the Black Consciousness Movement

> The *white South African* or Mississippi sharecropper or Alabama sheriff has at bottom a system of reality which compels them really to believe *when they face the Negro* that this woman, this man, this child must be insane to attack the system to which he owes his entire identity.
>
> James Baldwin, "The American Dream and the American Negro" (my emphasis)

The act of writing memoir for women in the global South, especially in cultures which embrace a traditional form of patriarchy, is heavily influenced by the value system of the individual writer. Mamphela Ramphele's process of writing from memory is often fraught with experiences of witnessing injustices against the women in various communities she has inhabited. The title of her memoir, *Across Boundaries*, is an accurate representation of the social, cultural, and professional pathways she has had to navigate throughout her life as a medical doctor, an anthropologist, a higher education administrator, and Managing Director of the World Bank. The apartheid system which dominated South African government throughout Ramphele's early life impacted many of her circumstances and influenced decisions she made regarding social justice and striving toward a better quality of life in her activities as a political activist and as an anthropologist. In fact, the common thread that Ramphele weaves throughout her life's experiences is a belief in activism that leads toward a better quality of life for all South Africans. Paul Gready writes that, "The life-story genre was so prominent within the literature and discourse of the apartheid era because it contained within it an insistence on the narrating 'I' or 'we'" (11). Mamphela Ramphele's memoir epitomizes the necessity for this voice as it depicts the aesthetics of human and civil rights violations against the South African people. More specifically, as is noted in the subtitle of her memoir *The Journey of a South African Woman Leader,* Ramphele illustrates the complexities involved in her emerging sense of feminism and

how it affects her perspectives on the lives of South African women as well as her professional advancements.

The abolition of apartheid created greater professional opportunities for Mamphela Ramphele than she had prior to the demise of the discriminatory system. While Ramphele enjoyed a successful career as a physician, she was able to actively participate in national government to a greater extent under Nelson Mandela's African National Congress. As a leading member of the Black Consciousness Movement, Ramphele was widely known among individual members of the movement as she lived and served throughout different regions of the country. However, her more mainstream positions as Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town and Managing Director of the World Bank have afforded her international acclaim. As worldwide momentum for the abolishment of apartheid increased, so did Ramphele's opportunities for advancement. While Ramphele acknowledges the invaluable lessons of organization and diplomacy that she learned as a political activist, she also admits to internal struggle resulting from her efforts to advance the cause of all South Africans, not just the black population. In her memoir, Ramphele describes her attempts to justify her decision by writing

> My choice of a research area and the use of a participatory research methodology were in part aimed at reducing the level of discomfort I felt in my new position—my guilt as a survivor. In this way I could convince myself more easily that my academic work was a continuation of my previous work and did not subtract from my political commitment. It was much more difficult to convince my former co-activists and others who feared that my energies would be neutralised as an agent of change. Many regarded my entry into the academic world as a loss to the struggle (*Across Boundaries* 166).

Because of her deep commitment to increasing the quality of life for people of color, Ramphele feels the need to justify her new academic life to her colleagues. More significantly, she refers to herself as a *survivor*. She does so at the same time that she expresses the guilt associated with this status. Ramphele also notes that she faces criticism from those whose views matter to her. Nevertheless, she successfully attempts to combine the spirit of activism with the discipline of

anthropology which she describes as the "handmaiden of colonialism" (*Across Boundaries* 166). While Ramphele's internal conflict should not be considered trauma in its most traditional sense, the necessity to justify her actions causes Ramphele additional anguish and may have contributed to the physical and psychological breakdowns she experiences during various transitions throughout her personal, academic, and professional lives.

Such internal conflicts continue to plague Ramphele in her new capacity as an anthropologist. An episode she considers significant enough to include in her memoir is her determination to use the word patriarchy to refer to the dominant social structure of the immigrant hostels. She admits to being inspired by American feminism to incorporate the term into her immediate environment although she once again faces opposition: "One of my colleagues objected to my use of the term 'patriarchy' to refer to the system of male-dominated power relations I saw in operation. Patriarchy was not a widely used term in South Africa at the time . . . I reminded him [the unnamed colleague] that I was not there to become an anthropologist, and that I would continue to use the term anyway" (167). Ramphele justifies her use of the term as the most appropriate means of describing the "dynamics of gender" within her immediate environment, and her use of the term further demonstrates her emerging feminist sensibility as well. Ramphele also further emphasizes that her goals for focusing on the patriarchal structure in place in South Africa extends beyond the academic discipline in which she studies to include her interest in human rights and a quality of life for the hostel dwellers. It also includes the gender politics which she observes that had garnered little attention within the context of an examination of the effects of the apartheid system.

Because Ramphele experienced colonialism in her own life in the form of apartheid, she shares an affinity with the hostel dwellers at the same time that she conducts research on the

factors leading to their plight. Within her study, she focuses on the effects of gender roles on male-female dynamics within the Cape Town hostels. The observations of her study are in line with Arundhati Roy's theory that, "A government's victims are not only those whom it kills and imprisons. Those who are displaced and dispossessed and sentenced to a lifetime of starvation and deprivation must count among them, too. Millions of people have been dispossessed by 'development' projects . . . In the era of corporate globalization, poverty is a crime" (*An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* 86). Thus, Ramphele observes the slightly more residual effects of apartheid than the graphic individual stories documented in the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. She studies the desolate conditions of the hostel dwellers and the lack of resources which would lead to a better quality of life, however she is hesitant to criticize the African National Congress—with her friend and colleague Nelson Mandela at the helm—in doing so. She is equally as cautious to make accusatory statements about the "corporate globalization" that Roy refers to, for she would in fact be admitting to her indirect participation in a continual system of poverty in her position with the World Bank. One of Ramphele's goals in conducting the study on poverty-stricken people is to combat the notion that, as Roy sarcastically states, "Perhaps . . . negroes . . . don't qualify as real people. Perhaps our deaths don't qualify as real deaths. Our histories don't qualify as history. They never have" (47). Ramphele's refusal to accept such an assessment of people of color is at the core of her participation in the Black Consciousness Movement. She remains consistent in refuting this line of thinking, even with the prominent positions she has held. However, the conflict she has had to encounter in justifying her more conservative roles since the Black Consciousness Movement has caused her great angst. She describes this internal conflict in her memoir along with the

images she forced herself to re-live as she remembers the unbearable living conditions of the hostels during her writing process.

Mamphela Ramphele also addresses in her memoir the trauma resulting from loss as a major contributor to her sense of justice. She does not separate her experiences of loss from her political life or other traumatic events. She describes her introduction to politics as "a silent one" with the detainment of her aunt and the expulsion from school of her older sister for participating in a demonstration (*Across Boundaries* 28). These events occurred when Ramphele was approximately seven years old, however she suggests that these events would shape her views on governmental policy in the future. Audrey Chapman and Hugo van de Merwe make the disturbing observation that "Apartheid killed more people through its economic and social oppression than through acts of direct physical violence" (6). Often, the subtleties of the human rights violations South Africans suffered during apartheid were difficult to justify because of their indirect effects on the population.

And yet, some governmental activity was in fact not so subtle. Just as Mamphela Ramphele attacks the issue of the apartheid regime, she simultaneously reflects on the crisis of witnessing, especially in the episode of her memoir in which she describes her imprisonment. Ramphele introduces this section of her memoir, in fact, by describing the witnessing of her friend and colleague Mapetla Mohapi's imprisonment and death which was announced as a suicide although the members of the Black Consciousness Movement, including Ramphele, believe that Mohapi's death was caused by murder. Ramphele's attendance at Mohapi's postmortem examination represents an example of the professional life merging with the personal which Ramphele describes very specifically as traumatic (*Across Boundaries* 111). The decision to detain Ramphele shortly after Mohapi's examination seemed intentional on the part

of the security police; she writes that “To add insult to injury, I was detained on the late afternoon of 6 August 1976 as we were preparing to bury Mapetla . . . so I was prevented from taking proper leave of Mapetla—a double blow” (111). Such an event adds to Ramphele’s visual experience of witnessing death caused by violence. While different in nature and circumstance, Ramphele’s witnessing the effects of Mohapi’s death results in the same crisis of witnessing as the deaths that occur at her hand during her medical practice.

In the section of her memoir that she dedicates to her imprisonment, Ramphele focuses primarily on injustices suffered by others instead of acts of violence directed at her personally. She does, however, describe some of the more deplorable conditions she had to endure during her detainment, including food and lodging, adding that “Prison food has a bad reputation throughout the world, but in South Africa it was worse, because of the racial discrimination involved" (113).

While Ramphele experiences imprisonment firsthand and simultaneously witnesses injustice against her comrades in the movement, she recalls acts of injustice she witnesses in her childhood as well. Ramphele describes one episode from her childhood as a “particularly painful memory” in which one of her classmates was expelled from school for becoming pregnant (*Across Boundaries* 30). The girl and her child were also rejected by her family and then accepted back approximately a year later upon the child’s death. Even at an early age, Ramphele recognizes the inherent injustice of concerns specific to women such as teenage pregnancy within a traditionally patriarchal society; there is no mention of any social repercussions suffered by the father of the child. Nor does Ramphele explain exactly why she describes the memory as particularly painful. However, she does connect this experience immediately to her mother’s process of a difficult childbirth and how she and her siblings were divided to reside with relatives

during her mother's ordeal. This is an experience that she describes as traumatic for herself and her brothers and sisters (32). According to Ramphele's description, part of the painfulness of the memory is that there was a peace-keeping rationale behind the separation. She also suggests that there were aspects of patriarchal values incorporated into the decision: "The only reason I can now think of why all the children did not go with my mother was that my paternal grandparents would not have approved of 'their grandchildren' being looked after at my mother's natal home" (*Across Boundaries* 32). The idea of children belonging to the father's side of the family is consistent with patriarchal beliefs of male dominance. This rationale is also in keeping with an emerging sense of feminism which is a thread Ramphele weaves throughout her memoir.

Because the pain of loss is so constant throughout Mamphela Ramphele's memoir, the ways in which she writes about loss indicates her inability to come to terms with periods in her life in which the loss of human life is connected to trauma. Medical doctors will almost inevitably experience the death of a patient within a career of practice. Ramphele is no different as she states that, "doctors don't bury their mistakes easily, if at all" (102). She includes herself in this category and takes responsibility for the deaths she believes she contributed to. The first she describes as a neonatal death after a difficult breech delivery in a teenage mother (102). Ramphele cites her inexperience to know better as the cause for her inaccurate decision. The second was a woman who suffered from tonsillitis. Ramphele and her staff neglected to ask the woman if she would have a reaction to the medication, which was actually the cause of death. She considers her last example the "worst of all," perhaps because the victim was Steve Biko's sister, Bukelwa, with whom she shared a personal relationship outside of her practice. Ramphele reflects on her thoughts after the tragedy by writing, "There was no way of explaining away my guilt or of comforting the family in their distress. I felt I had betrayed the trust Bukelwa and her

family had placed in me" (102). The first two deaths Ramphele describes occur within the Zanempilo facility of which she was chief medical officer. While the first two women remain anonymous, Bukelwa died at her mother's house the day after receiving care from Ramphele. The approach Ramphele takes to witnessing Bukelwa's death is indicative of the trauma resulting from witnessing or contributing to one's death, according to Shoshana Felman's definition which includes the idea that, "One must come out on the other side of death: one must *survive* in order to bear witness, and one must bear witness in order to affirm one's survival" (117). This tragedy adds to the traumatic experiences Ramphele was forced to relive during the memoir-writing process. She elaborates on Bukelwa in such detail to commemorate her and thus validate her own life and survival through writing the memoir. Although only one of her examples, a pregnancy, was of a cause specific to women, Ramphele still brings a feminist sensibility to her description of these events within her medical practice.

In addition to patients in her care, Ramphele recounts suffering through the loss of those close to her in her private life. In so doing, she memorializes through writing those individuals who deeply affect her. The psychological split that is so characteristic of traumatized individuals is also evident in her writing as she honors these fallen individuals. Felman further writes that

> Neither the condemnation of contemporary history, nor the testimony of contemporary writing, is any longer bound by conventional limits of belonging, or by the commonsensical limits that insure [sic] the separation between life and death. But the purpose of the testimony is, precisely, to cross these lines in an opposite direction to the way the condemnation cancels them out: *to come out on the other side*—of death, of life, of the limits of belonging, of history as total condemnation (117).

Apartheid itself is a disgrace to the history of the South African people, so for Ramphele to examine the events of her life within its context adds an additional layer of collective pain to the already-traumatic process of memorializing the death of her loved ones through writing memoir.

Early in her memoir, Ramphele describes the pain of loss she experiences with the death of her father. She writes that his death introduced her to the reality of the pain of loss. This incident in fact caused her to question her faith in God:

> The fact that he had been ill since 1963 with cancer of the oesophagus [sic], and that he showed all the signs of suffering from an incurable illness, did not prevent me from praying for a miracle to heal him. Indeed my childish prayers were for such a miracle to occur. I could not see why an omnipotent and loving God could refuse me. It was to be my third major disappointment with God (*Across Boundaries* 48).

The questioning of one's faith is not a new phenomenon among people who suffer the loss of loved ones. Within trauma studies, Cathy Caruth frames her argument of questioning faith after suffering loss by writing, "The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all . . . we could say that the traumatic nature of history means that events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others" (*Unclaimed Experience* 17). Mamphela Ramphele's questioning of her father's death indicates the pain and anger she feels at the injustice of his death. Ramphele writes that her father's death was her first introduction to a sense of loss that would continue to affect her throughout her life. The trauma of this event thus recurs as well with the deaths of one of her children and with Steve Biko, their father.

One of the most traumatic incidents Ramphele recalls is the death of her daughter Lerato, the first child she conceived with Biko. She frames the context of the death of Lerato—a word which means 'love' in the Sotho language (89)—within decisions she makes as a professional and an activist and also notes that her child's death was an indication of the insufficient health care system that exists in South Africa:

> My mother was deeply affected by Lerato's death. She arrived a few hours after us, having been to fetch my daughter's body from the mortuary in Pietersburg. She felt she had failed me, but from all accounts she did what was humanly possible when Lerato developed a respiratory infection, but was limited by the poor state of health-care services in rural South Africa. Lerato died from lack of high-level care, ironically at the same hospital where her mother was born in 1947. There was no doctor available at the time of her admission, and the nurses on duty

> were not trained to handle emergencies such as those presented by severe respiratory illness in babies (91).

More painful still is the fact that Biko, still in detainment, could not be with Ramphele during the burial rituals and was represented instead by his brother, Khaya. Ramphele describes the pain Lerato's death caused her by writing, "The wound of this loss remains to this day. It is covered by a thin scar, given to bleeding at the slightest scratch. And there have been many excruciating scratches" (91). Ramphele creates a rather powerful image to illustrate how easily the trauma of Lerato's death can be triggered. In writing that Lerato died in the same hospital in which Ramphele was born and that she died as a result of the hospital's lack of resources, she is making a statement about inadequate health care as denial of a human right and, simultaneously, of her personal loss. Cathy Caruth writes that, "For consciousness then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life. It is because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living" (*Unclaimed Experience* 62). The disappointment of the death of Lerato is another layer onto the many traumatic experiences outlined in Ramphele's memoir. Part of what may have caused Lerato's death to be so painful is also the regret Ramphele had in leaving Lerato with her grandmother so early in her infancy in order to continue her dedication to civil rights activism in the Black Consciousness Movement. The death of her child was compounded by all the loss Ramphele had faced prior and may have caused her to reevaluate the value she places on her own life, especially in light of the deaths of those close to her which she contributes to the injustice of the apartheid system.

Hearing stories of unjust acts such as human rights violations was a constant occurrence during apartheid, however Mamphela Ramphele recalls in her memoir episodes in which her

medical practice forced her into traumatic situations combining her profession with her activism in the midst of the effects of the forces of apartheid. One particularly painful memory is that of Mapetla Mohapi whose testimony was offered by his wife Nohle to the TRC years later and previously referred to in this chapter. In her memoir Ramphele describes her witness to her fellow colleague's death as follows: "I was asked to attend his postmortem examination on behalf of the family . . . It was one of the most painful duties I had to carry out as an activist medical practitioner. It is bad enough losing one's friend and colleague, but to stand by as his body was being cut up was very traumatic" (111). This episode illustrates one of many in which Ramphele would experience pain resulting from multi-layered roles in both her private and professional lives, many of which simultaneously cause her internal conflict leading to trauma. She also mentions that Mohapi's death in detention was the first of many activists in the Black Consciouness Movement, however the one on which she spends the most energy describing—practically for the remainder of the memoir—is that of Steve Biko.

Ramphele's focus on the conditions under which Steve Biko passed away and the effects his death would have are multilayered as well. Although Biko was an intimate companion, he also played a key role in creating awareness through a movement that contributed to eventually dismantling the apartheid regime. Ramphele admired Biko with the same sense of nationalism as fellow members of the Black Consciousness Movement. Ramphele thus grieved on a personal level in addition to lamenting the symbolism of hope that Biko represented for so many opponents of apartheid. Worse, Ramphele was to give birth to Hlumelo, the son the two of them conceived, who would not be born until after Biko's death. Thus, she also mourned the death of the father of her only living child at that time. Ramphele's ability to properly pay her respects to

Biko upon his death was complicated by not only the impending childbirth but later her own detainment and banishment as well. Ramphele writes that,

> The frenetic pace of work which had helped me channel my anger into creative work had only been successful in dulling the pain. But the ease with which the wound bled was an indicator of how raw it still was. I used to become physically ill every September [the month of Biko's tragic death]. I would go over the circumstances of his death in my mind's eye. I would imagine the pain he must have suffered whilst being tortured. I would see his attractive physique reduced to an inert confused pile by the brain damage he had suffered. I wept for him. But I wept more for myself, and the sense of loss of what could have been (148).

Ramphela Mamphele attempted to medicate her pain by engaging herself mentally in her professional obligations, however she admits that these efforts to cope with her loss were in vain. Her annual illness is a true testament to the subconscious body's reaction to trauma that the victim is unable to process mentally. Cathy Caruth describes this phenomenon by writing

> The pathology [of trauma] consists . . . solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what was once wished . . . The return of the traumatic dream . . . cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but is, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 4-5).

In not having to access to Biko during his incarceration, torture, and death, Ramphele takes on the characteristics of being a witness to an event that she is not present for. This is also a sign of deep-seated trauma according to Caruth's definition in that Ramphele attempts to deny her vulnerability to the image of Steve Biko's mutilated body by repressing her emotions associated with this image and instead concentrating on her medical practice and obligations to the movement. However, her efforts were in vain because, as she admits, the pain of the memory of Biko's violent death would return to her each year on its anniversary. Ramphele also acknowledges "how raw it still was" as an indication of the involuntary nature of her traumatic reaction and her inability to bring closure to her grief over Biko's death, which is, as Caruth indicates, a subconscious and inevitable reaction against her will or desire.

As Ramphele revisits one of the many occasions on which she broke her banning order—this time to visit Steve Biko's gravesite and perform the burial ritual for her friend which she had not had the opportunity to attend his funeral for—she is not psychologically prepared for the burial ground as a site of trauma such an experience would become. Ramphele was first disappointed at not being able to go near the gravesite and writes that, "there were people digging a grave just near Steve's . . . I could not take the risk of my presence being known. I had to be content with a distant view of the grave which had swallowed Steve" (*Across Boundaries* 147). As disappointed as Ramphele was during this part of her journey, she was devastated upon revisiting a place which had previously been filled with peace and contentment in her life: "The return to the Eastern Cape exacerbated the pain. King Williamstown looked so desolate and defeated. Any romantic notion I had of returning, even without Steve, died at that point. I knew it was no more my place. I had to add it to my list of losses" (147). Ramphele's personification of an environment in which she spent many of her happier moments became a site of trauma when it failed to garner the same emotions for her that it had prior to her banishment order. In one of the articles she contributed to *Bounds of Possibility*, Ramphele describes the township where she opened her first community health center by writing, "Zanempilo quickly became 'a meeting place' for all activists in the area. It also served as a guest house for visitors from far and wide who came to see the project or to consult with Steve Biko over a range of issues" (165). Unlike it was for the fictional character Sethe in *Beloved* (or perhaps exactly like it was for Sethe), the "places, places are still there" in Mamphela Ramphele's "rememory" which is detached from the reality that she sees before her. She further personifies the "romantic notion of returning" by saying it "died" inside of her although she was consciously aware that Biko would not be with

her on this visit. The visit became a site of trauma because of the memory the place once symbolized for her.

Because of her experiences of loss and witnessing trauma, Mamphela Ramphele's child-rearing methods even carry the effects of trauma. She admits to a neurotic paranoia over the safety of her older son which is a subconscious reaction resulting from the death of Lerato. Hlumelo—which in Xhosa means shoot from a fallen branch—was for a time Ramphele's second and only living child with Steve Biko (149). Ramphele refers to Hlumelo as her only connection with her past (150), a past that she is struggling to come to terms with through writing. She describes her instinctive overprotection of Hlumelo as follows:

> I would jump out of the bathroom semi-clad at the sound of a car starting in the driveway—I could not trust that others would take sufficient care to ensure that he [Hlumelo] was not standing behind a moving vehicle. My family would laugh, but understood my neurosis. I had , after all, lost my first child, Lerato, and was not going to let this one slip. I had in a sense made too much of an emotional investment in one child: this could not be good for either of us (150).

Ramphele struggled against overreacting to the possibility of death with her second child resulting from the actual death of her first. Lerato's death presented for her a "rememory" that she responded to physically, psychologically, and emotionally. Both of the children symbolize for her a connection to Steve Biko that she is not willing to detach. Her family members, in a sense, serve as witnesses to her trauma and react patiently with the knowledge of her past experiences. They understood her condition which Ruth Leys defines in formal terms: "In the moment of trauma the victim's psyche is split apart in such a way as to lose all psychic coherence . . . the effect of shock was to destroy or dissociate all mental associations and synthesizing functions" (124-125). While such behavior as running to the aid of a child who may not even be outside at the sound of a car engine may seem irrational, it is in keeping with Leys'

definition of the loss of logical functions associated with trauma. Ramphele's family was aware of this and was patient enough to acknowledge the effects of the trauma of loss on Ramphele.

In turn, Mamphela Ramphele's children themselves react to intense environments in ways that indicate that they have inherited the trauma their mother has experienced. Young children are often unable to articulate their concerns, however to react with fear to seemingly small occurrences indicates that the child has inadvertently assumed the parent's trauma. Ramphele describes an episode in her memoir in which a break-in occurred in her home from an individual that police were pursuing for throwing stones at local authorities. Ramphele writes that "Malusi, then only two years old and very tiny for his age, became so insecure in this war zone that he lost faith in my capacity as his mother to protect him. Whenever he heard the sound of gunfire he would slide under a bed and refuse to come out . . . He also began to bite his nails" (160-161). Malusi's behavior is a reaction common to those who live in constant fear. Dori Laub describes such a condition as "the actual return of the trauma and through its inadvertent repetition, or transmission, from one generation to another" (67). Because of the suffering Ramphele herself has endured, her younger son has inherited her anxiety and subconsciously reacts to incidents in a similar manner to his mother. Ramphele ends this paragraph by writing, "Such was the terror of living on the frontline" (161), and in doing so she also frames her son's reaction as one of the traumatic consequences of apartheid that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission sought to diminish.

Ramphele admits to attempting coping mechanisms to medicate the trauma she experiences resulting from both the death of her infant daughter and the violent death of her companion Steve Biko. She describes her attempt by writing, "I had up to then survived by losing myself in work. In fact I worked myself to a standstill on many occasions" (144). Such a

concerted effort is typical of people who have suffered trauma. However, this attempt to suppress the pain is rarely successful. Ramphele further admits, “Such a lifestyle protected me from facing the pain of loss, but I could clearly not sustain it” (144). Ramphele acknowledges that this coping mechanism came about because of her writing process. The act of writing the memoir forces her to reflect in ways which only one’s physical state would react to, which is what occurred during Ramphele’s initial pain of loss. Yet during the immediate pain of the wound she forced herself into the nervous energy she needed to cope. Writing the memoir, however, could have potentially been a more productive healing process than overworking herself. According to Dori Laub,

> Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor, indeed, is not truly in touch either with the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both. To undo this entrapment in a fate that cannot be known, cannot be told, but can only be repeated, a therapeutic process—a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of *re-externalizing the event*—has to be set in motion. This re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside (69).

Mamphela Ramphele works endlessly to the detriment of her physical and mental health while attempting to come to terms with the deaths of those close to her, and although she internalizes the pain she is not able to fully acknowledge it until she begins to write about it. Until then, returning to the mental anguish—or, as Toni Morrison would define it, the “rememory”—causes Ramphele great physical hardships.

Mamphela Ramphele describes two physical breakdowns she suffers eight weeks apart during her anthropological research, further emphasizing the physical effects of trauma on the detachment of her physical from her psychological state. Even the language that she uses to segue into a description of the breakdowns is inherently fraught with references to violence and undertones of devaluing one’s humanity:

> The added depth which political activism gives to one's professional work has embedded within it the seeds of self-destruction. The merging of one's personal life with the destiny of one's own country is a powerful but deadly combination. One's entire life becomes dedicated to national service and eventually one starts to feel as if one is being treated as, or has indeed become, national property. I had to face up to this sooner or later (184-185).

Ramphele suggests in this passage that her physical breakdown was somewhat inevitable as a reaction to the intensity of her dedication to the movement against apartheid. More specifically, she notes the personal investment she makes which she describes as "powerful but deadly," thus supporting her previous description of self-destruction. In associating this feeling with one being "national property" dehumanizes her into a possession of the state. As previously noted in her memoir, the split between first and third-person voice indicates an inconsistency characterized by trauma. She attributes the first breakdown to overworking herself while at the Bunting Institute at Harvard University where she claims she worked "to a standstill" and that several days passed before the medical staff determined that she simply needed to rest. The state of relaxation, however, is in conflict with the nervous energy typical of trauma victims which had sustained her up to that point.

Ultimately, Ramphele admits that emotional pain and acts of violence she has witnessed are the factors leading ultimately to her breakdown. In the true spirit of a civil and human rights activist, Ramphele connects her anxiety to the potential failure of the freedoms for South Africa that she fought so hard to attain:

> I realised that I was in the grip of a serious metaphorical post-natal depression. Had all the energy one put into the struggle been worth it? What if post-apartheid South Africa turned into a big disaster with violent conflict between the various contenders for power? I could not see myself living in such a society. I had invested too much physical and emotional energy in this society to countenance the possibility of a negative outcome of the liberation struggle. But what would I do if worst came to worst? (*Across Boundaries* 190).

Ramphele believes that she has made such a great personal investment in the movement that the possibility that her efforts could have been in vain adds to her anguish. Her deep passion for social justice and her and her colleagues' struggle to attain it—including lives that had been

sacrificed—added to her overall mental and physical state which already included characteristics typical of victims of trauma.

Equally as frustrating to Mamphela Ramphele is how slow the progress has been for a better quality of life for the poverty-stricken population of South Africa, despite her personal efforts even in her post-activism capacity as a researcher in the migrant hostels. She makes a connection between her physical state and her mental state and how each was jeopardized as a result of her witnessing injustice as a participant-observer in the hostels: "The demands of fieldwork were exacerbated by the horrible conditions in which people lived. I became physically ill at the end of 1987 from sheer exhaustion and anger at the dehumanizing conditions of the hostels . . . one's psyche takes punishment under such conditions" (168). A common tendency in trauma victims is to respond physically to mental anguish, and Ramphele's reaction is no exception. Interestingly, Ramphele contributes both exhaustion and anger to her mental state. Consistent with the continual thread she weaves throughout her memoir of her commitment to social justice, her witnessing of the human rights violations associated with poverty is what she acknowledges as the cause for her illness. Also interesting in this episode—and a common within Ramphele's writing—is the distancing of herself in the third-person voice from the first-person with which she begins her narrative. Shoshana Felman notes that such a departure is characteristic of trauma victims witnessing human rights violations:

> The specific task of the literary testimony is, in other words, to open up in that belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capability of perceiving history—what is happening to others—*in one's own body,* with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement (108).

The reader of Ramphele's memoir then becomes witness to her anguish and her internalization of the adverse living conditions of the hostel dwellers as she takes up their cause and thus inherits their plight while conducting her study. While Felman focuses more specifically on the role of

the reader, Ramphele as the writer indeed demonstrates characteristics of the traumatized witness during her time in the hostels.

Mamphela Ramphele's choice of language to describe various transitions from one stage in life to another is yet further indication of the trauma of witnessing. In fact, Ramphele at times refers to stages in her life which she struggles to find the language to illustrate to the reader, phases that—in Toni Morrison's terms—are truly "unspeakable":

> The year 1985 was one of real growth for me and crucial for the development of my academic skills. My initial intention was simply to sit back and take in what I could from the richness around me whilst regenerating my energy. Years of activism had left me drained in ways *which are difficult to describe to anyone who has not had the experience.* It was not simple burn-out; rather it was being programmed for action to such a degree that total relaxation became a rare and strange phenomenon for the body and mind—almost painful (161 my emphasis).

Ramphele admits to conditioning herself to living intensely on the edge during the political activist stage of her life. To describe the transition as "painful" suggests the trauma of memory resulting from discomfort—possibly even guilt—from no longer engaging in the movement. Earlier in the memoir, she admitted to a nervous energy that enabled her to cope with the loss of those close to her and with witnessing acts of violence through working continuously. The pain of her time to reflect results from having to confront reality with difficulty; this includes coming to terms with witnessing violations of human rights and civil rights that, considering her concerns, may have been in vain.

Ramphele acknowledges her recollections of struggle within the writing process in other articles she has written in addition to her memoir, especially in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*. She admits in *Across Boundaries* that

> Writing the book was itself part of the process of healing which I have had to go through. I had to record that part of my history as objectively as I could. The participation of former fellow activists in the project, particularly Barney Pityana and Malusi Mpumlwana, made it more meaningful as a collective process of healing. But like all collaborative projects, it took time and energy to keep it on course (201).

The use of the present perfect tense in the first sentence suggests Ramphele's continuation of a process which has not yet reached completion. The possibility that Ramphele is still in this process is characteristic of victims of trauma who never recover from experiencing and/or witnessing the traumatic event. More curious still is Ramphele's attempt at objectivity over such an intimate friendship as that which she shared with Biko. While there are several possibilities for her choice to maintain an objective stance in the work—including compromising her professionalism—Ramphele also admits to the personal nature of one of the articles she contributes to this collection.

Mamphela Ramphele contributed two articles to *Bounds of Possibility*, one in which she elaborates on Black Consciousness Movement community development projects and the other in which she explores gender relations during the movement. Throughout the narrative on gender relations, subtitled "A Personal View," Ramphele clearly attempts a formal stance. However, she is often unsuccessful in establishing distance as is illustrated in the following:

> *I* soon learnt to be aggressive towards men who undermined women, both at the social and political levels. Socially *one* had to cope with being regarded as available to men, because *one* was single. *One* was also constantly told and reminded that *one* was an exception to the male assumption that beauty and brains do not combine. *One* fell prey to the flattery implicit in such remarks and began to see *oneself* as being different from other women (218, emphasis mine).

Shifts in voice indicate Ramphele's indecision over attempting intimacy with the reader with the use of the first person or distance from the reader generally associated with using the third person. Sissela Bok explains the significance of using the first person in autobiography by writing, "Memory and belief are crucially at issue—not only their own memories and their own beliefs but their efforts to influence how they are to be remembered and the beliefs that will be entertained about them" (308). Bok juxtaposes the use of the first person with the third by writing of the third person voice, "It is here that the contesting of memories can be most bitter; and here that such accounts can most easily be visualized as moral battlegrounds" (315). Given

the subject matter and the conflicting messages Ramphele reports receiving from her male colleagues in the above passage, the shifts in voice indicate a split in memory which is common among trauma victims. Ramphele is unable to decide if she wants to engage the reader intimately by writing in the first person or maintain a more reserved tone with the third person. She chooses to use the third person more consistently, however the aesthetics of the issue are lost in her attempt to maintain distance regarding an issue that clearly affected her intimate relationships. It is also possible that she attempts to establish distance from the topic itself since she admits elsewhere that in spite of her emerging feminist identity, she still held to traditional gender roles during this phase of her life (*Across Boundaries* 154). Her stance is further complicated by her consideration of herself as "other." While she appears to celebrate this status, she also considers herself "prey" to the possibility of manipulation that her female colleagues were not subjected to. As Ramphele constructs her identity throughout the memoir, she weaves the theme of otherness throughout her various environments.

Identity formation is also a major element of Ramphele's "The Dynamics of Gender." Ramphele admits throughout the narrative that the fluidity of gender roles—both her own and those of others—shaped her current feminist perspectives. She recalls of her early assertion of her equality, "At the Zanempilo Health Centre, where I was the medical officer in charge, I confronted men who objected to my participation in communal eating, by saying that the only remedy they had was to withdraw to protect their honour, because I was determined to exercise my right to participate. The men relented" (220). Because Ramphele outranked the men surrounding her, she had the freedom as chief medical officer of the center to assert her demands and have them met. Doing so gave her a sense of empowerment and further realignment of her own ideas about gender equality. Ramphele began to appreciate her status as a medical doctor

and use it to her advantage. She states in the article, “Other people also responded to me as an unusual phenomenon” (221). She elaborates on this belief in her memoir by acknowledging the freedom afforded to her because of her profession: “Security police in both King Williamstown and Tzaneen . . . all change their response to me because of my profession. They could easily dismiss me as a black person, a woman, but not as a medical doctor. This was strategically important, and remains so in my current engagements” (*Across Boundaries* 204-205). Ramphele expands this ideology into a broader perspective in which she relates her professional status to empowering her political role with the unifying support of her female colleagues which shaped the professionalism she currently incorporates into the many evolutions of her professional life from medical doctor to anthropologist to higher education administrator: “Over time women evolved survival strategies in the male-dominated political sphere. I was one of a group of women within the Black Consciousness ranks who became assertive, to the point of arrogance. We learnt to be tough, insistent, persistent, and to hold our own in public and private debates” (219-220).

The solidarity Ramphele developed resulting from her status is attributed to not only her humility, but also to the change in her mentality inherent in her belief that freedom from the oppressor is possible. Ramphele’s psychological liberation falls within the same realm of the mentality of former slave Frederick Douglass when he confronts his overseer, Mr. Covey. Douglass recalls that

> The battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few burning embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free . . . I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I would be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me (69).

Both Ramphele and Douglass believe within their respective time periods that to include this change in mentality into their autobiography or memoir marks a significant moment for giving reasons that attributed to their ability to serve as witnesses to those who were also oppressed. In Douglass' case, this meant the slaves who witnessed the fight. For Ramphele the witnesses were the patients at the Zanempilo Health Centre as well as the hostel dwellers in Cape Town and even possibly the students at the University of Cape Town, especially the women. It is no coincidence that Douglass recalls this episode of his life in his autobiography as a turning point, the same as Ramphele. The ideology of Douglass' mentality also resonates throughout the philosophy that the Black Consciousness Movement to end apartheid was based on, a sense of empowerment to combat racial and social injustice as well as end human rights violations against a vast majority of the population within the country.

While Ramphele's sense of empowerment may be accurately reported as a realistic course of events, the nature of the memoir or autobiography is to document thematically the image the author wishes to portray: "Memory would be not only literally essential to the constitution of identity, but also crucial in the sense that it is constantly revising and editing the remembered past to square with the needs and requirements of the self we have become in any present" (Eakin 293-294). Ramphele selects episodes from her past life of activism that specifically illustrate the formation of her feminist identity and support her current feminist perspective. The feminist aspects she highlights both in *Bounds of Possibility* and in *Across Boundaries* are clearly elements of her idea of the self she wishes to portray to the reader.

One aspect of this self is her professional life. Ramphele highlights the intensity of her roles in both the medical profession and the movement for social justice and how the two both

complemented and conflicted with each other. She writes that, "My dual responsibilities[1] increased my burdens, but also accelerated my growth as a person" (103). Ramphele attributes the more political tasks of her new position to knowledge she would be able to incorporate into her later roles as Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town and Director of the World Bank. While she focuses on what a strain time management-wise these two roles caused, she also emphasizes to a greater extent how much she learned as a result.

The feminist ideology Mamphela Ramphele outlines in "The Dynamics of Gender" about her experiences within the Black Consciousness Movement remain consistent throughout her memoir *Across Boundaries*. One aspect of Ramphele's identity that she struggles with and arguably attempts to resist is her image in the media as it relates to Steve Biko. She writes,

> I can only infer that my public persona is an uncomfortable one for patriarchal society to deal with, and has to be given 'respectability' by summoning Steve from the grave to accompany me and clothe me in my nakedness. In summoning him to my side, society chooses to forget the multi-dimensionality of the relationship I had with him as colleague and fellow activist, and only dwells on the aspect which presents me as an instrument of his nurture and a bearer of his son. My comments are not intended to deny the important role Steve played in my personal life, but to pose the question about the extent to which that relationship has become a marker on my body to enable society to relate to me (180).

Ramphele frames society's acceptance and/or rejection of her as a public figure within a patriarchal ideology to illustrate both the severity of the traditional domestic roles women are expected to fulfill in order to be considered virtuous and to emphasize more specifically the belief feminism rejects that a woman's primary role is to reproduce. Add political widowhood article.

Exploration of Ramphele's self-identity emerges within the latter chapters of *Across Boundaries* as Ramphele acknowledges her "evolving sense of feminism" (66) as a connected

[1] Ramphele took over as Director of the Eastern Cape Region of the Black Consciousness Party after Steve Biko was banned. She took on this responsibility in addition to continuing her post as Director of Zanempilo Health Centre.

element of her political identity, thus indirectly inferring the idea that the feminine and political are indeed connected. Early in the work Ramphele establishes the alliances certain members of her family had on the national level, including political party affiliations (28-29). By doing so, she sets a precedent for her introduction to politics by acknowledging the sense of justice that was instilled in her by her family which in turn fueled her own political activism. In an early chapter entitled "Initiation into Activism," Ramphele describes how she charts her own path toward developing a political identity and sensibility that would remain with her throughout her life. The early philosophy of her family would later inspire her to become active in the student movement during her early years of medical school. The fervor of the student movement captured and reinforced much of the philosophy Ramphele had been conditioned to believe in her earlier life. However, the chapter in which she describes her first participation as a student activist—appropriately entitled "Initiation into Activism"—she maintains a distant stance which can be interpreted in two ways. Ramphele goes to great detail to name the future leaders of the South African Students' Organisation and its founding without including herself, which could be considered an act of humility. However, this could also be seen as a form of trauma to maintain a distance from the subject instead of including oneself in it. Ramphele seems to hesitate to describe her own evolution and participation, however she eventually admits,

> I began to understand and to interpret my own personal experiences of racism and oppression in the light of the discussions going on around me. Given my rural background and lack of access to news media and political discussions till then, I had not fully grasped the relation between the personal and the political (57).

With this realization, Ramphele recognizes an aspect of her identity which connects her to her passion for social justice. Not until she became affiliated with the group of students who initiated the movement did she begin to learn, as she explains, "The true history of my country, the struggle to resist conquest, and later the struggle for equal rights with those who had conquered

us, the stories of the heroes of the struggle (no women were included in these narratives at the time), and the role students could and should play to take the struggle forward" (57). Ramphele begins to acknowledge the part she must play in this continuum both as a student and as a woman. In noting that there were no women leaders in the struggle at that time, she also begins to develop her emerging sense of feminism which she would adapt to the apartheid-ridden, traditionally patriarchal environment in which she lived.

Mamphela Ramphele focuses further on a form of feminism which is most appropriate to her environment and spends the latter part of her memoir defining her formation of this aspect of her identity. Throughout one of her latter chapters in which she asserts her independence, she elaborates on the significance of Terri Apter's "superwoman syndrome" and what it has meant for her life and the lives of the women who have influenced and inspired her (172). She logically concludes that the living conditions of most South African women force them into the role of the superwoman for the sake of survival. In taking the example of her mother, the observation she makes is as follows:

> From my own experience, 'superwomen' do not necessarily believe that they can have everything because they can do a much as two or three people. It is a condition of being black and woman in South Africa that one *has* to be a 'superwoman.' My mother did not choose to remain a primary schoolteacher whilst bringing up seven children with little help from her traditional husband. She had to do both *and* thus had to learn to do as much as three people. The doing of what two or three people can do becomes a survival strategy, not the reason for taking on multiple roles. Many ordinary poor women in South Africa are presented with the 'superwoman' title by the historical accident of their birth, not because they seek it (172).

Ramphele presents the "superwoman syndrome as a matter of necessity, not choice. In her explanation, she also notes the traditional nature of her father's role, suggesting that his child-rearing and domestic responsibilities were minimal. She rationalizes that her mother, in turn, had to condition herself to take on multiple tasks for the sake of her family. So as not to suggest that the superwoman expectation is reserved only for middle- and upper-class women, she also concludes that women of lower economic classes must also take on multiple roles out of

necessity. The superwoman concept is yet another aspect of Mamphela Ramphele's identity that combines racial discrimination and aspects of a traditional form of patriarchy in order to subordinate women.

She expands the paradigm of the superwoman, however, to locate herself both within and outside of its parameters. As the syndrome relates to her personally, Ramphele describes both the positive and negative aspects it has had on her life. She immediately refutes the traditional roles of most South African women—even within the superwoman paradigm—and instead focuses on her position as "honorary male":

> Balancing my role as mother and professional has become more of a challenge over the years . . . as my work became more demanding, the balancing act grew more taxing. It is, however, perhaps fair to say that the biggest problem for me in my mature years is not presented by being a working woman, but by the competing demands of national agendas, which impinge on the delicate balance between mothering and work-time achieved through trial and error over the years. The spectre of the role of honorary male looms large for women in my position . . . How does one function in roles which were previously the preserve of males? (175)

Mamphela Ramphele has not permitted traditional roles to define her and instead locates herself outside of the patriarchal-inspired societal expectations of women. Whereas this approach has led to much of her success, it has also been a source of trauma throughout her lifetime. Ramphele admitted to conditioning herself to multitask as a means of coping with witnessing violence and with the loss of loved ones in ways that often jeopardized her physical and mental health. Her justification is that she did so for the sake of human rights and civil rights and for the advancement of social justice for the underprivileged within the South African population.

The process of writing memoir has caused Mamphela Ramphele to examine her progress on a continuum from her exposure to political activism to becoming an international force for change in the lives of disenfranchised people and throughout all the evolutions of her professional life. It has also forced her to revisit the results of acts of violence she witnessed within her medical practice and experienced firsthand as a political prisoner and civil rights

activist. In juxtaposing the events of her personal life with the challenges of her public persona, Ramphele has truly crossed several boundaries and has been an inspiration in her passionate and tireless efforts to improve the lives of the South African people.

Chapter Four

Patriarchy, Commodification, and the Fiction of Nawal El Saadawi

> Silence and the loss of voice may eventually constitute or represent for some who suffer a complete shattering of the self.
>
> David Morris, "About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community," 29

The Tunisian revolution of January 2011 and all events leading up to the ousting of Hosni Mubarak as Egyptian President on February 11th signify the essence of Nawal El Saadawi's commitment to social justice and the abolishment of corrupt governmental practices in Egypt. Producers of the Riz Khan talk show have deemed El Saadawi as the "Mother of the Revolution," and with good reason (Riz Khan.com). El Saadawi recalls the local activism she witnessed from her grandmother and mother, dating back to the days of Egyptian King Farouk, as her inspiration for human rights activism. Like Mamphela Ramphele, Nawal El Saadawi often incorporates into her writing her beliefs about injustices against women who struggle to maintain a quality of life that includes an adherence to human rights practices throughout the global South. Throughout her fiction and non-fiction, El Saadawi has chronicled through her own passion and commitment to human rights activism the culmination of the recent victory of the Egyptian revolutionaries. While injustices against women in Middle Eastern countries have just acquired widespread attention in the West since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, El Saadawi has provided commentary on the effects of corrupt government as early as her 1981 imprisonment under the Anwar Sadat regime as a result of publishing *The Hidden Face of Eve*, which exposed the cultural beliefs housed within patriarchy that destroy the intellectual and social productivity of women's lives. Even her earliest works of fiction, including *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor, Two Women in One, Woman at Point Zero,* and *The Circling Song* all weave a common thread of exposing the injustices of corruption that destroy the morale, culture, and economic fiber of the people. Nawal El Saadawi criticizes through her fiction the widespread

cases of rape and domestic violence against women that contribute to the destruction of communities, both local and global.

Fedwa Malti-Douglass notes overarching themes within Nawal El Saadawi's novels that represent El Saadawi's philosophy regarding patriarchal systems and women's human rights. More specifically, Malti-Douglas notes that El Saadawi prioritizes the physical condition of women as a factor affecting all other aspects of women's lives, which is not surprising considering her career as a medical doctor. For example, in reference to *The Circling Song*, Malti-Douglas notes that, "The body in the Saadawian literary corpus is more than a source of conflict. It is intimately tied to a discourse of gender and sexual definition" (3). The idea that the body is connected to sexual definition, especially given the highly political nature of many of El Saadawi's works—both fiction and memoir—illustrates her deep commitment to addressing physical and psychological violations against women in the global South as well as society's perspectives on these issues.

Because of her strong views on gender relations within patriarchal society, Nawal El Saadawi is often judged harshly by critics who often misinterpret her work. Malti-Douglas writes that, "The wide familiarity of El Saadawi's name has its disadvantages, however. There is perhaps no other writer about whom so much misinformation has been propagated by critics, some of whom no doubt consider themselves favorably disposed to the Egyptian feminist" (10). For example, Joseph Zeidan criticizes George Tarabishi for, among other of El Saadawi's works, his criticism of *The Circling Song* in which Zeidan writes, "Reading this part perhaps too literally, Tarabishi asserts that this [symbolism of Hamidu's possession of a stick] 'reverses' Freudian theories and 'insists' on 'the uniformity of sex and its origins'" (137). However, Zeidan himself is no less over critical in his analysis of El Saadawi's work. In *Arab Women*

Novelists, Zeidan in fact critiques El Saadawi's work at the same time that he criticizes the analyses of both Fedwa Malti-Douglas and George Tarabishi on Nawal El Saadawi's critical works. At some points Zeidan condemns Tarabishi's interpretation in defense of El Saadawi such as when he writes, "Tarabishi's remark the 'feelings of hostility' toward women 'positively ooze from all three novels' . . . further illustrates his confusion of the characters with the overall meanings of the novels and thus with al-Sadawi [sic] herself" (136). In fact, Zeidan stands in El Saadawi's defense in observing that Tarabishi's interpretation of some of her fictional works was so misguided that he joins El Saadawi in her own response included in the preface of Tarabishi's work: "His [Tarabishi's] reasons are problematic and . . . suggest a lack of distinction between the author and her characters and between the characters' own conscious beliefs and the messages the novels are meant to convey" (135). Simply put, Zeidan's analysis is further evidence that Nawal El Saadawi's common theme regarding women's human rights in the patriarchy-influenced Arab world is multi-layered and warrants more than a surface analysis, particularly her desire to change prevailing concepts of power for women both locally and globally.

The issue of commodification arises even in relation to the western audience El Saadawi is considered to be writing for (and is, in fact, accused of addressing primarily). Fedwa Malti-Douglas observes that,

> El Saadawi treats gender problematics with a directness that is rare, not only in Arabic letters but in mainstream media throughout the world. It is this directness that makes her so threatening. The image-of-the-Arabs-in-the-West argument is but a smokescreen. What really matters is the attack she is waging on values long cherished—and not only in the Middle East. The accusation of stoking anti-Arab fires, however, almost always carries other charges in its wake. Is not Nawal El Saadawi writing for a Western audience? Does this not make her a 'Western' feminist? It would then follow that El Saadawi's writings do not provide their reader with an 'authentic' vision of Arab women and the Arab world (15).

Of course this concept also begs the question of whether or not El Saadawi believes she has a responsibility to enlighten the non-Arab world by depicting Arab culture from her perspective, especially when addressing issues of patriarchy and women's human rights. While determining the extent of damage caused by commodification of women's memoir and testimony is difficult—and in fact could potentially become more expansive in light of recent uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt—an overrated emphasis on the plight of women does not necessarily decrease the number of human rights violations suffered by women in the global South.

Equally as problematic is the assumption that El Saadawi's individual perspective should be expected to represent all women in the Middle East. The purpose of life writing is, by definition, to reflect upon the experiences of the individual writer from his or her perspective. To approach a text with the expectation that the writer's story—especially given the level of privilege that El Saadawi was born into—is an accurate representation of the majority of Egyptian women does an injustice to the writer and in fact feeds into the stereotypes that foster the exploitation of autobiographical works from women writers of Middle Eastern descent. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note, for example, that, "Given the U.S. 'war on terror' and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, it is not surprising that many narratives by women originate elsewhere but circulate in the West, where they are used in culture wars about the status of women in the Islamic states" (131). For writers such as El Saadawi whose novels, poetry, and critical essays indicate her passion for human rights and social justice, the possibility of subjecting one's creative work to publishers' motives becomes a sacrifice for a greater cause. Smith and Watson further write that "Often, witnesses understand and position themselves as members of a collectivity whose story must be recounted" (133). The notion of understanding

should not be dismissed. El Saadawi feels a strong affinity with the women she writes of in her memoirs and novels, all of whom experience varying levels of the effects of Egyptian social law.

Nawal El Saadawi's writing style and career path merge in ways that are unexpected by readers who are unfamiliar with academic settings in the Middle East, and the doctor/writer often voices her frustration over constant questions regarding her career choices. While the transition from medical doctor to fiction writer seems like a drastic conversion when viewed by a Western readership, navigating between the two may be more of a natural progression in the Middle East. Fedwa Malti-Douglas writes that,

> Several of the most sophisticated and most influential writers of the contemporary Arab world are or have been practicing physicians. There is a societal reason for this: in the Egyptian educational system, for example, the best secondary school graduates frequently entered the faculty of medicine, the career path that was at once most demanding and the most prestigious. Further, different branches of the Arab intellectual elite are far closer to one another than is the case in the West . . . Hence, the designation 'physician-writer' does not have the sense of duality or even possible contradiction that it has in the United States today (21).

Malti-Douglas mentions several writers who follow this pattern, including Yusuf Idris and El Saadwi's husband Sherif Hetata. However, El Saadawi seems to be the most prominent woman writer to address the plight of women specifically. Not only does El Saadawi herself make a connection between the two professions—and admits to her astonishment when people are amazed that she both writes and practices medicine—but she also relates the two crafts to her passion for social justice, specifically regarding women's human rights:

> As a medical doctor and a writer, wherever I went I was pursued by the question 'How do you manage to combine medicine and literature?' The question was always asked in a tone denoting disapproval, and suggesting a dire need for me to choose one profession, which could only be medicine, so that I could spare women from being handled by a male doctor . . . I myself did not perceive any fundamental contradiction between my medical and literary activity. On the contrary they nourished one another. My knowledge of the medical sciences, my work in rural areas, my relations with male and female patients, fed my writings with a deep and rich experience, and with human and artistic material characterized by its reflection of the reality I was living and the wealth of details related to it (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 217).

In this passage, El Saadawi briefly hints at a criticism of patriarchy that denotes the oppression women face regarding health issues such as the repercussions of being examined by a male doctor. This issue of being treated by a female doctor when they are so few and far between is arguably a human rights issue in that women's lives and health are in jeopardy if no female doctor is available during a medical emergency. Such an issue is inherent in El Saadawi's reference to working in rural areas and also to being able to relate to her patients. She ultimately connects the richness of her experiences to the politics of injustice against the Egyptian people by writing, "In the same way my passion for writing . . . permitted me to see human beings in all their depth, helped me in my work as a medical doctor . . . and its inability to cope with the main problems related to society and people" (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 217). The inspiration she receives from her ability to acknowledge the depths of the human spirit causes El Saadawi to enhance both her medical practice and her writing. However, witnessing injustices against impoverished people could have been the cause of El Saadawi's desire to take political action. In turn, the resulting trauma of witnessing the effects of violence against women significantly affects her writing process.

Perhaps a more clinical and less literary definition of trauma is appropriate in analyzing Nawal El Saadawi's fictional works. Sociology and American Studies Professor Kai Erikson defines trauma by explaining that

> Trauma is generally taken to mean a blow to the tissues of the body—or more frequently now, to the tissues of the mind—that results in injury or some other disturbance. Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind has set up as a line of defense. It invades you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape—'possesses' you . . . –and in the process threatens to drain you and leave you empty. The classic symptoms of trauma range from feelings of restlessness and agitation at one end of the emotional scale to feelings of numbness and bleakness at the other. Traumatized people often scan the surrounding world anxiously for signs of danger, breaking into explosive rages and reacting with a start to ordinary sights and sounds, but at the same time, all that nervous activity takes place against a numbed gray background of depression, feelings of helplessness, and a general closing off of the spirit, as the mind tries to insulate itself from further harm (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 183-184).

El Saadawi's fictional characters often exhibit traumatic behavior, especially the women characters and especially those who have suffered physical violation—either through rape or domestic violence—at the hands of a male. For example, two of her more well-known works, *Woman at Point Zero* and *The Circling Song*, have main characters who suffer from the effects of rape. However, even in her first work of fiction, El Saadawi begins to explore political structures that systematically oppress women and challenge their rights to a quality of life.

Nawal El Saadawi's first novel, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor,* addresses the multi-layered power struggle debate between men and women which complicates traditional patriarchal values. Medicine represents power that is traditionally associated with men, however in this case it is bestowed upon the unnamed female protagonist of the novel. This is an important paradigm both within the novel and in the context of analyzing patriarchy as a social construct where women are expected to have limited access to political or economic power: "The rite of passage that separates childhood from adult status is the heroine's medical training. Medicine equals power, and it is this power that, in fact, instigates the narrator to attend the medical faculty in the first place. Medicine gives the male attribute of power to the female" (*Woman's Body, Woman's World* 133). However, with this sense of power comes a set of experiences for the narrator that she admits affected her psychologically. In a paper El Saadawi once presented entitled "Women in the South in Relation to Women in the North," she explains

> I am originally a medical doctor. I studied the body separate from the mind. I became a very good physician ignorant of the human being as a whole. I had to study psychology and psychiatry to know more. I had to go beyond the medical sciences to study religion, economics, politics, history, philosophy . . . to understand why I was oppressed as a woman . . . (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 22).

In this passage, El Saadawi merges her own experiences with those of her patients by explaining that although she has studied both academic and medical fields for her professional growth, she

is ultimately committed to understanding why she is subjected to gender-specific violations of human and civil rights.

The heroine of *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* experiences varying forms of physical violation in her early life at the hands of various men she comes in contact with, and each of these instances is connected to her overarching theme of the many injustices against women within a culture that advocates the subjectivity of women. Referring to a scene with a doorkeeper, a friend of the heroine's father, and lastly with her cousin, Fedwa Malti-Douglas observes that in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*

> Despite their various degrees of social licitness, these three incidents are all treated in the text as more or less open forms of physical violation, as unwanted male sexual power over woman. In the heroine's adult experiences, however, it is she who determines the outcome of the encounters, who initiates and terminates relationships with the males. The balance of power has shifted (*Woman's Body, Woman's World* 132).

Among the harsh criticism that this first attempt at fiction received, the novel itself presents crucial questions of the roles of women in Egyptian society. El Saadawi herself admits to this intentional shifting of the balance of power in the forward to a later edition. She notes that her critics revered the work as "a revolutionary feminist novel which revealed the double exploitation of Egyptian women—both their general, social oppression and their private oppression through the institution of marriage" (7). However, she also admits to the controversial nature of the work. In both Malti-Douglas' and El Saadawi's own observations is the issue of societal codes that subjugate women socially and physically. This would become a consistent theme throughout El Saadawi's later literary works as she interrogates this balance of power, influenced by corrupt government practices and traditional forms of patriarchy that have complicated the lives of women in the global South both physically and culturally. The "anger against the oppression of women in my country" El Saadawi admits to in the author's note in

Memoirs of a Woman Doctor (8) are no less prevalent in her inspiration for *Woman at Point Zero*, a novel she bases on a case study she conducted at Qanatir Prison some years later.

Woman at Point Zero is the epitome of the deconstructionist concept of societal expectations of women. The heroine, Firdaus, is a prostitute who eventually kills the man she was working for and justifies her actions by placing accountability on the government for forcing her into her profession. Because Firdaus as a prostitute is already ostracized by society as less than virtuous, she is existentially free to create a new identity separate from expectations of the ideal Egyptian woman. She justifies her profession by rationalizing that her experiences make her fearful and forever forging toward freedom from restrictions:

> In prison they kept me in a room where the windows and doors were always shut. I knew why they were so afraid of me. I was the only woman who had torn the mask away, and exposed the face of their ugly reality. They condemned me to death not because I had killed a man—there are thousands of people being killed every day—but because they are afraid to let me live . . . I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die. I want nothing. I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore I am free. For during life it is our wants, our hopes, our fears that enslave us. The freedom I enjoy fills them with anger (*Woman at Point Zero* 110).

The "they" Firdaus is referring to is not only the administrators of the prison system, but also all members of the patriarchal system who attempt to ostracize her. Firdaus blames the societal codes that limit women's options for forcing her into prostitution, especially after the academic training in her early life and the significantly lower salary she earned as an administrative assistant in her intermittent attempt to abandon a life of prostitution. The violence she suffers at the hands of both family members and the pimps she worked for leads her to the ultimate retaliation: murder. Nawal El Saadawi is deeply influenced by her relationship with the real-life Firdaus whom her fictional character is based on. She admits that in many ways, the social laws of patriarchy also limit her own ability to live freely as she attempts to obey those laws as a member of society. Firdaus' sense of freedom results from her life outside (above?) the law

which El Saadawi admires to the extent that she ends the novel on the day of Firdaus' execution with:

> I never saw her again. But her voice continued to echo in my ears, vibrating in my head . . . shaking everything, spreading fear wherever it went, the fear of the truth which kills, the power of truth, as savage, and as simple, and as awesome as death, yet as simple and as gentle as the child that has not yet learnt to lie. And because the world is full of lies, she had to pay the price . . . I felt ashamed of myself, of my life, of my fears, and my lies. I rammed my foot down on the accelerator as though in a hurry to run over the world, to stamp it all out. But the next moment I quickly lifted my foot and braked hard, and the car came to a halt. And at that moment I realized that Firdaus had more courage than I (110).

The triangulation created by Firdaus, an unnamed interpreter, and the reader is also an example of the trauma of witnessing violence. What is also re-created for the unnamed narrator-as-witness is the trauma of Firdaus who recounts her story to the narrator. El Saadawi admits to this trauma of witnessing in the first chapter of the novel. She describes the anguish she experiences after Firdaus—the actual name of the true-to-life person the fictional character is based on—refuses to allow a visit from El Saadawi after several attempts. El Saadawi writes of this experience in the voice of the narrator:

> My whole life seemed to be threatened with failure. My self-confidence began to be badly shaken, and I went through difficult moments. It looked to me as though this woman who had killed a human being, and was shortly to be killed herself, was a much better person than I. Compared to her, I was nothing but a small insect crawling upon the land amidst millions of other insects. Whenever I remembered the expression in the eyes of the warder, or the prison doctor, as they spoke of her complete indifference to everything, her attitude of total rejection, and above all her refusal to see me, the feeling that I was helpless, and of no significance grew on me . . . I tried to overcome my inability to sleep, but another thought started to occupy my mind and keep me awake" (3-4).

Especially telling qualities common among trauma victims are the sleeplessness and feelings of helplessness El Saadawi experiences. Clearly a lack of sleep and feelings of helplessness alone do not indicate that a person has been traumatized, however El Saadawi feels an affinity toward Firdaus not only because she constituted a vital part of the research she was conducting at the time (compiled in a later work entitled *The Hidden Face of Eve*), but also because her husband Sherif Hetata, translator of many of her works and an author himself, had been a political

prisoner for thirteen years. El Saadawi acknowledged the ways Hetata's prison experience affected his outlook and perspectives after his release as well as his passion for the fair treatment of prisoners.

As Nawal El Saadawi becomes a witness to Firdaus' trauma through listening to her story, she internalizes the trauma and revisits this experience through the writing process. As to the question of why El Saadawi would create a multi-layered narrative in *Woman at Point Zero* in which Firdaus narrates her story to a second party, Fedwa Malti-Douglas writes,

> If these internal narratives could have stood on their own, without need for a physician-narrator, what is the function of the embedding? First and foremost, the external first-person narrator adds a second subjectivity to that of the internal narrator. More important [sic], these embedded texts turn the narrative authority over to the physician, who becomes ultimately responsible for their transmission. Furthermore, by having embedded narratives that are not directly related to any medical questions, the text extends the power of the physician beyond the medical into the general (*Woman's Body, Woman's World* 140).

Thus, the narrator-physician within the text not only lends credibility to Firdaus' story, but also contextualizes her particular predicament within the larger Middle Eastern context regarding women's human rights. In essence, the narrator elaborates on the main character's predicament in ways that Firdaus herself cannot. Along with Malti-Douglas' explanation from a literary and critical standpoint on the issue is an equally important explanation within trauma studies theory. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun writes that, "Testimony is both an enabling and disabling violence; it is both voluntary and involuntary. The intertwining of experience that trauma demands means that testifying is not enough: we must also respond and listen to others' testimony so that the self does not take the place of the other" (158). The unnamed narrator becomes intertwined with Firdaus's narrative to the extent that she inherits the trauma of Firdaus' plight and makes it her own, metaphorically speaking. The subconscious level on which this trauma-of-the-witness

occurs is common among trauma survivors. El Saadawi forces herself to revisit Firdaus' experiences through the process of writing the novel.

Thus, the true-to-life imprisoned Firdaus commits a speech act by offering her testimony to the unnamed narrator which El Saadawi in turn re-creates as a fictional work. Jason Tougaw writes that, "Testimony, as a speech act requires a community of readers whose intersubjective relations are structured by and through the text. This intersubjectivity enables the testimony to produce its desired effects, which can range from memorializing to inciting political revolution" (170). Firdaus' speech act, although fiction, is meant to inform the reader of the injustices against her and to interrogate the corruptness of the national political system that forced her into prostitution. In turn, it is the writer and witness to the testimony, El Saadawi, who is motivated to take political action. Simultaneously, she is also memorializing the prisoner who is to be executed the next day. Dori Laub elaborates on the significance of the speech act by writing, "Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*—in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to *somebody*: to somebody they have been waiting for for a long time" (70-71). Based on El Saadawi's account of the helplessness she experiences after Firdaus' refusal of her interview request, El Saadawi is ironically the party who had been waiting. Nonetheless, the victim and witness both re-live the trauma of the injustices of the patriarchal system in place: one by offering the testimony and the other by both listening to the story and re-creating its events into the novel.

Nawal El Saadawi expands and continues to interrogate the theme of political corruption in *The Circling Song.* In her introduction to the novel, El Saadawi admits to a psychological

block that prohibits her from fully acknowledging her inspiration for the novel. Her description of the source of the block may have resulted from the trauma of witnessing; the inarticulateness with which she attempts to explain the absence is characteristic of the classic definition of trauma in which the active conscience is blocked and the reflexes of the body attempt to compensate for the absence. In the first paragraph of her introduction to the novel, El Saadawi says that she was "going through a period marked by an enigmatic, internal sadness" (*The Circling Song* 1). Although she is unable to identify the source of her sorrow, she does recognize the time period—November 1973—as the time she was inspired to write the novel. She also acknowledges some of the "external" occurrences leading up to her inspiration for the novel: "being deprived of my position and summarily dismissed from my job the year before (in August 1972) because of some of my published writings; the confiscation of my books and articles; and the inclusion of my name on the government's blacklist" (1). In spite of this list, El Saadawi makes a clear distinction between these external events and her internal sadness as if the two are separate from each other. What is notable, however, is that all of these external factors could potentially inspire within the writer either a sense of loss or a violation of personal privacy.

Another event that she connects to this time period—while at the same time avoiding making a connection to her melancholy—is the hatred she admits she has toward the ruler of Egypt at the time. Also notable is that she does not list the president by name. Anwar Sadat is not only responsible for being Egypt's president during the time El Saadawi began writing *The Circling Song,* but was also presiding over the regime when El Saadawi was sent to prison in 1982. It was not until after his assassination that she was released. Perhaps her hatred would not permit her to name him; doing so would force her to acknowledge his humanity. While still not connecting her sadness to the hatred she felt for Sadat, she does admit that hate was a fairly new

emotion for her: “But a relationship of sorts developed between the ruler and me (from one side, of course); it was an association based on hatred. I had not experienced hatred before in that way: at the time, most of my relationships were ones built on affection” (2). The hatred El Saadawi admits to is parallel to the anger of the major characters toward the national government in the story line of *The Circling Song.*

Further indication that Nawal El Saadawi has suffered trauma is her reaction to even the process of deciding which of her works should be the first to be translated into English. *The Circling Song* had been published years prior in Beirut, however she chose it based on her initial reaction upon rereading it:

> I realized that I was very fond of *The Circling Song*, and that it was like the sort of close relationship which one does not forget no matter how many years pass. I hadn’t read the novel for ten years, as I don’t like to read my books after they are published, but the translator of this novel gave me a copy of the translation for me to review. The strangest thing happened: it seemed as if I were reading it for the first time. I would stop at certain sections, surprised, as if the writer were another woman, someone other than me. Indeed—and how peculiar this seemed—I felt actual tears coming whenever Hamida (or Hamido) cried. And this is how I knew that the translation was as I wished it to be (*The Circling Song* 4).

Several characteristics commonly associated with traumatized individuals emerge within El Saadawi’s preface to the novel. One is her emotional state, suggestive of her reliving the traumatic experiences that inspired the novel in the first place. For El Saadawi to feel a compassion for the main characters so deep that it brings her to tears when they experience pain or sadness indicates a triggering of the anger and hatred, referred to previously, which she felt toward the Egyptian government just before writing the novel. Also significant is the distancing of herself from the subject. She even startles herself with her reaction to reading the work as if she had never read it before or as if had been written by someone else. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun argues that,

> The force of the traumatic event comes partly from its citation to other such events . . . we can link events together, yet insist on the singularity of each one. Iteration alters, yet a citation gains force only because it ‘repeats’ or refers to other events. If we view such events as citations, we can discuss larger social implications in ways that shift the focus away from the perpetrator’s

> inner psychology or intentions. Rather, we can discuss the community that the perpetrator joins with his or her actions (159).

While El Saadawi insists on the separation between the events of her life at the time of writing the novel and the fictional story, those events can be considered as referents to the story she creates. In focusing on the greater social commentary the novel makes instead of attempting to connect the story to El Saadawi's personal trials, the reader is able to engage with the larger issues of human rights and civil rights the novel addresses. Contextualizing the lived events and the fiction together could perhaps then be an indicator of her emotional reaction to reading her own novel as if someone other than herself had written it. Still, this reaction in turn becomes a *reflex*, a subconscious response to the memory of the events surrounding El Saadawi during the time the novel was written which may have, in turn, triggered a traumatic memory.

El Saadawi even incorporates the cyclical nature in which she wrote, the characters, herself as writer, and her reading audience into a connectedness indicative of the novel's title. Doing so gives her a cohesiveness and an affinity to the social commentary the novel attempts. Prefacing a description of her writing process with a description of the setting, including a bamboo table and chair overlooking the Nile, she writes

> I wrote the first draft of the novel in a few weeks, and rewrote it in a few days. As I wrote certain sections, I could feel the tears on my face. When Hamida (or Hamidu) felt tears, I felt my own. I was sure my novel would amount to something, for as long as I was crying real tears along with the characters of the novel, then surely this work was artistically alive, and would have a similar effect on those who read it (*The Circling Song* 2-3).

The vital nature of the story is important to El Saadawi because of the significance of the story's message. El Saadawi believes in the triangular nature of herself as writer, the characters, and the reader. The connectedness of these entities is ever present in El Saadawi's identity as a writer and her sense of regional and cultural representation.

The story line of *The Circling Song* focuses on the violent separation of its two main characters, a set of twins named Hamida and Hamidu, and their odyssey of losing and finding each other which El Saadawi incorporates into a representation of the corrupt nature of the Egyptian government during that time.

In keeping with overarching themes that El Saadawi commonly revisits, rape and other forms of violence against a woman's body are major elements of *The Circling Song*. However, each of the acts of violence against women must be examined separately. Malti-Douglas writes that

> The three rapes, despite their similarities, in fact represent different forms of violation. The first rape, with its generic male culprit, calls attention to the gendered nature of the act. The second rape, with the 'government' as culprit, underscores the patriarchal and political nature of male aggression against the female. To the question of gender has been added patriarchy and politics. With the third violation, perpetrated by an upper-class 'master' on a poor woman, the circle is complete. Class is now attached to gender and politics to unite the three dimensions of male violation of the female body (75-76).

Thus, the multiple factors that oppress women and systematically compromise their human rights are addressed in the novel.

Still, the act of rape is prominently highlighted as the ultimate act of physical violation against women within the novel. In her summary of the novel's plot, Malti-Douglas writes "The narrator follows her and describes a sleeping Hamida. The girl is then raped. The mother, upon discovering her pregnancy, sends her from the village on a train. The father then dispatches Hamidu, the girl's twin brother, to kill her and, hence, to wash out the shame. In the city (which we discover to be Cairo), the hungry Hamida is raped by a policeman, who catches her trying to steal bread. Eventually she becomes a household servant and is raped again" (69). The trauma of witnessing the psychological and physical effects of rape for the writer is based on her constant description of rape crimes in *The Circling Song* and in her other works of fiction and also in *The Hidden Face of Eve.*

An example of the idea that El Saadawi is traumatized by witnessing rape or the effects of rape is evidenced in a scene in *The Circling Song* in which the unnamed narrator visits Hamida after she has been raped. Malti-Douglas makes the observation based on this scene that

> She [the narrator] stands by in the darkness, like a voyeur, observing the rape. She does not stop it but seems content simply to relate to it . . . Hamida, despite her closed eyes is able to recognize the perpetrator of her molestation. It is Man (with a capital *M*). Hamida, the victim, has a face resembling that of the narrator. Her identity is, therefore, not so singularized as it is generalized. Might she not represent every woman, as the rapist represents every man? If so, then her physical violation would be the violation of the generic category of woman. This congruence facilitates the presence of the female narrator during the rape, for on a certain level she, too, is a victim of the unwanted sexual act, along with Hamida (71-72).

Such a connection between a victim of trauma and his or her witness is common. Miller and Tougaw note that, "By definition, memoir, autobiographical fiction, poetry, and personal criticism devoted to life lived in extremities all tell a story about trauma from the perspective of the person who experiences it" (6). By extension, novels can arguably be added to this list in the case of Nawal El Saadawi. The number of references to blood, ailing and maimed bodies, and physical violence (especially within a sexual context) is an indication of the effects of rape and violence El Saadawi was exposed to during her medical practice. The connection between Hamida and the unnamed speaker causes the narrator to feel as if she has been raped vicariously through the witnessing of Hamida's violation.

In order to further complicate notions of power in gender relations, Nawal El Saadawi deconstructs notions of gender between the twins, Hamida and Hamidu, by merging the identity of the two. In doing so, she once again calls into question the lack of rationale used to justify the systematic oppression of women. El Saadawi writes that, "in the Arabic language, even one point—a single dot—can completely change the essence of a word. Male becomes female because of a single dash or dot" (8). El Saadawi combines this metaphor of vocabulary with her larger analysis of power relations based on gender by Hamidu's constant fear that his male

sexual organs have been replaced with a woman's: Malti-Douglas observes that "More than once, Hamidu checks for the male organ" (85). In spite of his fear, Hamidu never becomes female within the text although at times the author calls his masculinity seriously into question, such as right after he is tried in the case of an attempt to kill his sister and thus return honor to the family resulting from Hamida's premarital rape (incidentally, Hamidu's record was practically cleared and he received little more than a sentence of probation). After creating a mythical deconstruction of the creation story in which Adam is cursed instead of Eve, El Saadawi reports that after his sentencing, "Hamidu stole a quick glance between his thighs, but did not find the member in question. Instead, and in its place, he found a small cleft which reminded him of the cleft he used to see on Hamida's body" (41). The questioning of Hamidu's masculinity and checking to make sure his male organs are still intact alludes to a vulnerability that El Saadawi does not subject Hamida to. Yet, Hamidu's constant fear that he will lose an organ that symbolizes his power within the patriarchal structure represents the deconstruction of societal codes which ultimately is El Saadawi's goal in writing the novel.

The oscillation between gender roles within even the naming of the two main characters further strengthens El Saadawi's persistence on the impracticality of gender roles. The writer states that "The letters of some names are similar, particularly as certain names given to females can be distinguished from male names only by the single-letter, feminine ending . . . Hamidu becomes Hamida. In other words, with a mere stroke of a pen, man becomes woman (42). El Saadawi's interrogation of this metaphor is a common theme in the debate on women's human rights. In feminizing the male equivalent (Hamidu) to the female (Hamida) in a female-centered text, El Saadawi resists the societal subjugation of women. Thus, the novel is a commentary on the potentially destructive nature of societal constructs on the quality of the lives of women:

> Gender malleability . . . is central to *The Circling Song*. Whether one has a slit or a killing

> instrument determines a body's allegiance to one gender or another. A mere linguistic categorization determines a host of cultural issues. The play between male and female, the corporal uncertainty of who is Hamidu and who is Hamida, is provocative (*Men, Women, and God(s)* 86).

Merging the identities of the twins goes a step beyond the provocative when incestuous tendencies are introduced into the text: "She let his long arms enfold her, and his hot breaths warm her . . . She pretended to be asleep; she hid her head in the thick hair on his chest. When she felt the large fingers raising the garment from her body, she held her breath" (73). By the end of the novel, it is unclear whether the incestuous scene is meant to heal or bring closure to the trauma caused by rape, especially as late in the novel as it comes, or if it is intended to highlight the plight of the characters as the result of the destructive nature of patriarchy and the human rights violations that often occur within corrupt governing systems. Either way, the scene attempts in part to bring closure to an otherwise clearly constructed criticism of the reaction of Anwar Sadat's patriarchy-influenced regime, as El Saadawi suggests in the introduction to the novel.

A similar merging of twin births occurs in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things.* Like El Saadawi, Roy writes a novel about the detrimental nature of a patriarchal government on its people and the devastation that can occur when a nation's cultural identity is compromised by the current regime. Also similar to El Saadawi, Roy includes her most incestuous scene between the twins toward the end of the novel so that it serves as a climax to the subplot, bringing closure to the sexual abuse both of the main characters suffer within the novel.

Early within their respective works, both authors explain that the twins are connected by a bond greater than the biological explanation; each brother-sister set is connected spiritually. Roy writes that Estha and Rahel were "two-egg twins . . . Born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs" (4). Roy further explains that "The confusion [between which is which] lay in a

deeper, more secret place," similar to the privacy of the genitals which caused such confusion between Hamida and Hamidu (Roy 4). Roy writes that "Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities" (4-5). In Roy's work it is Estha, the male twin, who is molested first, in childhood. Both Roy and El Saadawi suggest that as a result of the intrinsic connection between the two, one inherits the traumatic effects of the other even without being present. Within the context of trauma studies, Dori Laub terms this phenomenon as the "history of repetition" when one family member inherits the trauma of another (67). Even Roy's description of the incestuous act is similar to the description of that which occurs in *The Circling Song*: "Then she [Rahel] put her arms around him [Estha]. Drew him down beside her. They lay like that for a long time. Awake in the dark . . . There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that . . . would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings . . . What they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief" (310-311). Intimacy between the two is comforting, neither violent nor shameful compared to the sexual violations the two had suffered at the hands of adults.

It is also no coincidence that the overarching setting for both novels is what is considered the global South, albeit two significantly different regions. Egypt and India, respectively, are both associated with overpopulation and poverty in major metropolitan areas and with traditional social structures based on religion. Themes of merging of identity and incest between the two works serve the same ends by their respective authors within a global South context.

In an essay entitled "Dissidence and Creativity," El Saadawi continues to emphasize the necessity of merging political activity with writing, including her own novels. Indeed, writing

itself can be a political act, especially for underrepresented groups in positions of power such as women in the global South:

> The split between power and responsibility has lain at the core of oppression and exploitation from the advent of slavery to this day. Dissidence is the antithesis of power divorced from responsibility for the misery of people. Responsibility does not mean aid or charity; it means trying to eradicate the causes of poverty and oppression. The concept of charity or aid is as pernicious to others as the concept of replacing the other's language or mind" (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 176).

Thus, writing as a means of resistance against human rights violations and the injustices of a society corrupted by patriarchy is a priority to El Saadawi. The relationship between writing and responsibility within one's community is as critical as the disengagement of power from responsibility which has caused so much destruction within the lives of impoverished people in the global South. Even more discouraging is Western readers' perception of women's writings from the Middle East and how narrow the Western focus can often be. In a widely-read study entitled *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide,* writers Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn conducted interviews with a group of Saudi female doctors, one of whom revealed, "'Why do foreigners always ask about clothing? Why does it matter so much what we wear? Of all the issues in the world, is that really so important?" (154). Another said, "'Look, when we're among ourselves, of course we complain about the rules . . . It's ridiculous that we can't drive. But these are our problems, not yours. We don't want anybody fighting for us—and we certainly don't want anybody feeling sorry for us'" (154). Nawal El Saadawi recognizes the complexities of women's roles in the Middle East because she has both lived within the culture and abroad so that she is able to compare the lives of women in both the South and the West, from Europe to Sub-Saharan Africa to North America. In much of her writing, she expresses similar sentiments to the doctors interviewed by Kristof and WuDunn. In fact, on the front cover of the most current edition of *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* appears a

quote from one of her essays: “Why keep asking me about my identity?” El Saadawi is often frustrated by the stereotypes of Islamic women that exist in literature and in the media and often expresses her disappointment with overexaggerated notions of women’s lives in the Middle East. Ironically, her expression of distaste is in contrast to the many critics—as mentioned earlier in this chapter—who firmly believe her primary goal in writing is to appeal to a Western audience.

Thus, Nawal El Saadawi has witnessed the effects of globalization both from within Egypt as well as outside. Amria El-Azhary Sonbol writes in *Women’s Rights in the Middle East*

> Contradictions and inconsistencies in Egyptian laws contribute to a continuation of violence against women. When applied correctly, the law is severe against convicted abusers, ranging from three years to life imprisonment for rape, with an added death sentence for the abduction and rape of a woman. On the other hand, the law does not seriously address violence against women in the home. Marital rape and emotional and verbal abuse are not considered crimes, and wife beating meets with condemnation only when it leads to serious injury (72).

According to the reports of Kristof and WuDunn, not much has changed since Sonbol’s report published five years prior to theirs. In their recent investigative report, Kristof and WuDunn make arguments both for and against religion as the primary cause of a decreased quality of life for people in the developing world, especially women. The authors state that

> Of the countries where women are held back and subjected to systematic abuses such as honor killings and genital cutting, a very large proportion are predominantly Muslim. Most Muslims worldwide don’t believe in such practices and some Christians do—but the fact remains that the countries where girls are cut, killed for honor, or kept out of school or the workplace typically have large Muslim populations (149).

The authors preface their observation by also stating that their point is “politically incorrect,” however the fact that “Of 130 countries rated by the World Economic Forum according to the status of women, eight of the bottom ten were majority Muslim.” (149). The economic stability of the nations in question is stagnant because half the workforce (the women) is underutilized. The reason has everything to do with the Chinese proverb that serves as inspiration for the title of the book: “Women hold up half the sky” (vii). In addition, Kristof and WuDunn report that “No Muslim country ranks in the top 40” and that “Only 25 percent of Egyptians believe that a

woman should have the right to become president (Incidentally, El Saadawi strongly considered running for president after her incarceration) (150). To undermine the civil and human rights of an entire gender is inevitably detrimental to the livelihood of its entire population, affecting not only its place in the political and economic global structure, but also its international trade, tourism industry, educational system, and preservation of its natural resources.

All of these statistics mirror the sentiments Nawal El Saadawi expresses some thirty years earlier as she conducts research for *The Hidden Face of Eve.* El Saadawi's study groups, in conjunction with her own individual observations growing up in Kafr Tahla, combine to illustrate the power of a patriarchy that has sustained the oppression of women based on beliefs from the time El Saadawi published her findings to the present. While some advancements have been made as a result of activists such as El Saadawi who have brought international attention to women's issues, the continuation of cultural norms is an indication of the power of the belief system and its intergenerational sustainability.

As previously mentioned, the lack of accountability from political leaders in the West inspires much of El Saadawi's commentary on the plight of economically impoverished nations. Nawal El Saadawi continually expresses her passion for the injustice of violence against women as a societal norm, and she recreates the trauma of the violence she witnesses as she describes some of her experiences as a medical doctor and later as a researcher and political prisoner. In the introduction to *A Map of Hope*, Marjorie Agosin writes that,

> In spite of the advances made in women's rights since 1993, when the UN World Conference on Women stated that the human rights of women and of girl children are inalienably and indivisibly a part of human rights, many world governments pay no attention to the severity of human rights violations that directly involve women, such as direct violence by the state, emotional and psychological violence in the nuclear family, sexual abuse and domestic violence, marital rape, and genital mutilation. Domestic violence is undoubtedly the primary form of violence against women. In some countries, men have the legal right to beat their wives, and in many other countries domestic violence is not treated as a serious crime (xiv).

El Saadawi witnesses the effects of violence firsthand since many of her patients are victims of physical abuse. At the same time that these instances inspire her later research and political activism, she admits to her own vulnerability and helplessness as she treats victims of domestic violence in her medical practice.

Violence against women is a subject that El Saadawi attacks throughout her fiction, critical essays, and memoir. She addresses the issue as if it *were* a crime punishable by law, although in many societies within the Arab world—as Agosin mentions—it is not. Agosin further writes that

> Political violence is also a fundamental issue of gender and human rights. Domestic violence does not consist only of the physical abuse of women, but includes the voicelessness, due to poverty, to the economic disadvantages closely linked to the fact that they are female . . . The mistreatment of women has made women activists attempt to redefine women's rights and their relationship to social and political rights in general, documenting as well as rethinking the particular dichotomies of the private and the public spheres (*A Map of Hope* xviii).

El Saadawi realizes the greater repercussions of widespread domestic violence and how it affects the men, women, and children of a community. In addition to rape as a specific form of domestic violence, other forms of physical abuse against women compile to both anger and inspire El Saadawi to not only advocate publicly for an increased quality of life for women, but also to write novels, plays, and non-fictional works exposing atrocities against women based on her first-hand account.

Sameena Nazir introduces her recent study *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa* on the plight of women, country by country, by observing that the power of cultural beliefs to sustain systematic violence against women is difficult to change. She summarizes the study by writing

> The comprehensive reports presented in this survey detail how women in MENA [Middle East/North Africa] countries face systematic discrimination in both laws and social customs. As a consequence, women do not enjoy equal rights as citizens, nor do they have a full, independent legal identity. In most countries under survey, women do not have legal recourse in cases of domestic violence. Although women's rights organizations have repeatedly raised the issue, not one country in the region has a law that clearly makes domestic violence a criminal

> offense. Arab women are significantly underrepresented in senior or executive positions in politics, government, the judiciary, and the private sector. The participation of women in political life in MENA countries is the lowest in the world (2).

The survey, published in 2005, reiterates many of Nawal El Saadawi's sentiments written years earlier. *The Hidden Face of Eve*, in fact, is not only the 1980 publication that caused her imprisonment, but the group and individual interviews El Saadawi conducts reiterate that women's oppression indeed results from interpretations of cultural and religious beliefs regarding women's roles in society. The interpretations themselves are necessary to emphasize, for as El Saadawi writes in the forward to Fawzia Afzal-Khan's *Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out*, "[Afzal-Khan's collection] clarifies that Islam is not the cause of terrorism or backwardness or oppression of women. It exposes the root causes of war and poverty embedded in the patriarchal capitalist system which has governed the world since slavery" (x). El Saadawi even notes that "The word Muslim or Islam on the cover of any book makes it a bestseller" and that "It is very clear that neo-colonialism and religious fundamentalism are two faces of the same coin. You cannot exploit people without some sort of divine power or some sort of religion," further acknowledging that post 9/11 commodification and exploitation are alive and well (x). It is not ironic—although it is disheartening—that some twenty-six years earlier in the introduction to *The Hidden Face of Eve* she expresses a similar sentiment: "Imperialism continues to fight back viciously and often effectively in defence [sic] of its interests in the Islamic and Arab world . . . Among these weapons is the use of religion . . . Any ambiguity in Islamic teachings . . . can be manipulated or born of intent in order to be used in fighting back against the forces of progress" (v). The barrage of women's autobiographical writings from the Middle East that have adorned the shelves of Barnes & Noble since the World Trade Center attacks are a disturbing testament to the extent to which publishers have capitalized

on the misinterpretations of both religion and culture. Kristof and WuDunn consider overarching sentiments similar to El Saadawi's, albeit within a post-9/11 context:

> Muslims sometimes note that such conservative attitudes have little to do with the Koran and arise from culture more than religion. That's true: In these places, even religious minorities and irreligious people are often deeply repressive toward women . . . After the Taliban was ousted in Afghanistan, banditry spread and Amnesty International quoted an aid worker as saying: 'During the Taliban era, if a woman went to market and showed an inch of flesh, she would have been flogged; now, she's raped.' In short, we often blame a region's religion when the oppression instead may be rooted in its culture. Yet, that acknowledged, it's also true that one reason religion is blamed is that it is often cited by the oppressors. In the Muslim world, for example, misogynists routinely quote Muhammad to justify themselves" (150).

Manipulation of the titles of books to serve the marketing and commercial needs of publishers is nothing new, but in fact the desire for revenue influenced the name change from the original Arabic title of El Saadawi's 1980 study to its title which was revised for the English translation. In an article entitled "Muslim Women in the Market," El Saadawi writes about the politicization of editorial decisions of her work during production:

> In Germany the publisher of my novel *Woman at Point Zero* changed my original title into a very bad title from an aesthetic point of view. The publisher changed the title to *I Spit on You* . . . The culture in Germany likes aggressive titles, and the free market likes violence. Similarly, the American publisher . . . omitted my introduction to *The Hidden Face of Eve* without my knowledge . . . She said it was too polemical—which means political—and publishers (even radical feminist publishers) do not want to take risks or lose money . . . All of my publishers in different countries are small and radical, feminist or socialist, but most of them compromise to survive in the so-called free market, which amounts to the freedom of the powerful to exploit the weaker (*The Essential Nawal El Saadawi: a Reader* 116).

Fellow Middle Eastern cultural critics have analyzed symbolism within the title changes as well and have also observed how the perception of the Islamic woman is manipulated for profit in the West. In an analysis of the literal and figurative differences of translation, Fedwa Malti-Douglas observes that

> Translated literally, the title should read: *The Naked Face of the Arab Woman*. The title of the Arabic original has but one word in common with its English counterpart, *al-Wajh* (Face). But going outwards from the face, both titles manage to center on obsessions dear to their own cultures: naked face, hidden (read: covered) face. For the Arab woman, El Saadawi wanted to emphasize the uncovering. For the Western reader, the translation wanted to evoke the veil and its fascination. For this reader as well, the Arab woman becomes transmuted into Eve, a more universal symbol for women. Cultural critics do not have to be reminded of the importance of book titles . . . this is not to belie the importance of Eve, either for El Saadawi or for gender criticism. Simply, in the title of her work, written originally in Arabic, the Egyptian feminist wished to emphasize the Arab

> woman and her struggle" ("Writing Nawal El Saadawi" 291-292).

Again, there is emphasis here on the commodification of Arab women's texts, autobiographical and otherwise, and Western fascination with the veil or *burqua* and all its cultural implications. The aesthetics of translation are, in fact, significant in examining the goal of the work. Aside from the fact that El Saadawi originally titled the work *Woman Against Her Sex*, even before *The Naked Face of the Arab Woman*, even changing the title becomes an act of resistance for the author.

In the first chapter of *The Hidden Face of Eve,* Nawal El Saadawi examines the cause of these exploitative ideas as they affected the lives of women during that time. In this first chapter, entitled "The Mutilated Half," El Saadawi opens with an autobiographical description of her own circumcision as a young child, an act that immediately precedes the circumcision of her younger sister the same day. In addition to the shock value of opening a discussion about physical violations of the female body with such a vivid account of the author's own experience, El Saadawi positions herself as somewhat of a participant-observer not only in the research she conducts on women within her same culture, but also in the lifelong trauma resulting from the circumcision experience and its effects. Choosing the word *trauma* is intentional here in direct correlation to the author's own explanation of the long-term effects of female circumcision:

> Even when I had grown up and graduated as a doctor in 1955, I could not forget the painful incident that had made me lose my childhood once and for all, and that deprived me during my youth and for many years of married life from enjoying the fullness of my sexuality and the completeness of life that can only come from all around psychological equilibrium. Nightmares of a similar nature followed me throughout the years, especially during the period when I was working as a medical doctor in the rural areas. There I very often had to treat young girls who had come to the out-patients clinic bleeding profusely after a circumcision. Many of them used to lose their lives as a result of the inhuman and primitive way in which the operation, savage enough in itself, was performed. Others were afflicted with acute or chronic infections from which they sometimes suffered for the rest of their days. And most of them, if not all, became the victims later on of sexual or mental distortions as a result of this experience (9).

Not only does such an act of violence destroy a woman's ability to physically enjoy intimacy, but affects her psychological health as well. As an ultimate example of the devastating effects of female circumcision, El Saadawi also reports of the deaths of patients in her care as she attempts to remedy patients of circumcision procedures that have gone awry. This passage presents a strong argument for the effects of trauma and memory as El Saadawi simultaneously compares her own lack of "completeness of life" and "psychological equilibrium" to that of her patients whom she observes suffering from "sexual or mental distortions." Not surprising among victims of trauma, El Saadawi makes these connections between body and memory through "Nightmares . . . throughout the years," further supporting the thesis of this dissertation that trauma among women in neocolonial settings who are forced to follow patriarchal conditions live daily with the effects of trauma not because they witness or experience these events during an isolated period, but because the threat of physical violence with little possibility of justice for the perpetrator exists daily. Just as Nawal El Saadawi identifies herself as a witness to women who suffer a lifetime of "acute or chronic infections," she also admits to her own lifelong experience of trauma.

Another element of *The Hidden Face of Eve* which led to El Saadawi's capture and imprisonment was the very feminist nature of her study. During a time when feminist theory and criticism was fairly new, even on a global scale, El Saadawi attempts to explore the aesthetics of women's oppression through a lens that is both feminist and postcolonial. Clinical psychologist Laura S. Brown notes that considering trauma from a feminist perspective adds a different layer of significance to the experience of trauma:

> A feminist perspective, which draws our attention to the lives of girls and women, to the secret, private, hidden experiences of everyday pain, reminds us that traumatic events do lie within the range of normal human experience. Faced with this reality, we will be moved to include in our understanding of human responses those events that *are* unusual (T*rauma: Explorations in Memory* 110).

This feminist point of view is necessary in understanding El Saadawi's goal in organizing the focus groups she reports on in the work. More evident than ever is the significance of the specific human rights violations that women suffer. El-Azhary reports that

> Violence against women is a serious problem in Egypt. Women victims of violence most often suffer within the home at the hands of family members, such as husbands, fathers, or brothers. Egyptian families and government authorities, such as the police, often ignore violent acts against women. Domestic violence and marital rape are not considered crimes in Egyptian law, and women victims of rape and incest have tremendous difficulties prosecuting their perpetrators. Spousal abuse is grounds for divorce, but the victim is required to produce medical reports of bodily harm as proof. The Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance conducted a survey that reported that 67 percent of women in urban areas and 30 percent in rural areas had been involved in some form of domestic violence at least once during a set period between 2002 and 2003. Less than half of those women who had been beaten sought help. The Ministry of Social Affairs have opened 150 family counseling centers to help victims of domestic violence, but many women victims still have limited access to supportive legal, psychological, and social services (74).

While the efforts of the Ministry of Social Affairs to create treatment centers is commendable, women often still feel a loyalty to family and beliefs that keeps them from reporting acts of violence. Since it is so widespread, many women and men accept from childhood these physical violations as a matter of course. This makes combating the problem all the more difficult. This cultural belief system is the uphill battle that El Saadawi believed she was facing as she conducted focus groups and attempted to create spaces where women could discuss their experiences and acknowledge the acts of violence against them as unjust.

Through witnessing domestic violence in the household, children come to believe in the inevitability of acts of violence in the home for which there are few if any repercussions for perpetrators. Men tend to devalue the quality of the lives of their victims. Women experience the voicelessness Laura Brown, noted above, refers to ingrained beliefs that create a hindrance for women's human rights advocates such as El Saadawi because the issue is considered such a low priority for government agencies. Just as in the ways Brown describes, El Saadawi attempts to analyze in her research the aesthetics of not only how women's personal lives are affected by

violence, but also the greater implications for society as a whole. Thus in her "Preface to the English Edition" of *The Hidden Face of Eve,* El Saadawi focuses primarily on the victories and advancements that have been made toward equality for women in the Middle East as a framework for questioning why these inequalities exist rather than criticizing the injustices of governmental policy. Interesting to note is that the title of the preface suggests that a different preface was published for editions in Arabic or other languages. Thus, once again, El Saadawi is placed in a position where she bears the burden of explaining her culture to an English-speaking readership. El Saadawi clarifies in her introduction that her inspiration for writing *The Hidden Face of Eve* is that, "Long years of medical practice in both urban and rural areas, and the men and women who day after day rang my door bell and stepped across the threshold of my home, carrying their load of psychological and sexual problems, have led me to write this book" (1). She then outlines the list of questions she sought to answer through the study groups she conducts and explains that the chapters that follow report her findings. One of the major themes throughout the work is that rape and domestic violence against women severely undermine the human rights women are entitled to and that such violations should be punishable by law. In doing so, El Saadawi takes a step toward what she often considers to be the futility of advocating for women's human rights.

A large part of the pervasiveness of violence against women is twofold. On one hand women are still considered the property of a marriage not only in the global South, but in many parts of the world. Another is that violence in the home is still considered a private matter that should be of no concern to law enforcement agencies. Most traumatic experiences do occur in private, and El Saadawi's acknowledgement of this phenomenon partially fuels her desire to organize the focus groups. Laura Brown writes that, "They are the experiences to which women

accommodate; potentials for which women make room in their lives and their psyches. They are private events, sometimes known only to the victim and the perpetrator" (101). El Saadawi observes this phenomenon in her female patients and is thus inspired to conduct a study to support her claims and to expose the injustices that occur daily against women. Brown further notes that

> 'Real' trauma is often only that form of trauma in which the dominant group can participate as a victim rather than as the perpetrator or etiologist of the trauma. The private, secret, insidious traumas to which a feminist analysis draws attention are more often than not those events in which dominant culture and its forms and institutions are expressed and perpetuated (102).

Brown's distinction between the "real" trauma that can also be experienced by men and what she later terms "background noise" (103) is a direct attack on not only the male perpetrators of violence against women, but also on the patriarchal system that perpetuates the private nature of the rape and domestic violence. Brown makes another disturbing observation that women's traumas are not taken seriously. In reference to one of her patient's testimonies, she writes,

> To deny that this patient's, and many other women's experiences of trauma, are in fact traumatic, and to insist that only the disordered and diseased would respond to such treatment with severe distress, sends a message that oppression, be it based on gender, class, race, or whatever variables, is to be tolerated; that psychic pain in response to oppression is pathological, not a normal response to abnormal events. It is *not* seen as traumatic . . . To admit that these everyday assaults on integrity and personal safety are sources of psychic trauma, to acknowledge the absence of safety in the daily lives of women and other nondominant groups, admits to what is deeply wrong in many sacred and social institutions and challenges the benign mask behind which everyday oppression operates (105).

This feminist perspective is El Saadawi's modus operandi for writing *The Hidden Face of Eve*. The main reason El Saadawi was interested in conducting the study in the first place is that she did not believe that women's experiences of trauma were being taken seriously within patriarchal society. Arguing that "everyday oppression" cannot possibly be traumatic creates an eternal systematic denial of women's rights to physical and psychological safety which in turn jeopardizes otherwise healthy relationships between men and women, adults and children.

Fear of the endangerment of safety, resulting especially from physical violations that are specific to women primarily, are indeed traumatic when instilled within a culture, so much so that individuals who have not been violated suffer the same trauma as those who have. Laura Brown locates this phenomenon within a feminist context when exploring the effects of rape by writing, “All of us know someone like ourselves who was raped, more often than not in her own home by a man she knew. In consequence, many women who have never been raped have symptoms of rape trauma” (107). When acts such as rape and domestic violence are prevalent in society, the witnesses along with the victims of such acts suffer from possible recurring violations. Although in explaining her theory Brown uses examples of women in North America, the same idea could hold true for women in patriarchal settings where crimes such as rape and domestic violence are condoned. The possibility causes young women to be extra cautious, however more disturbing is the inevitable fear and its consequences that come with such caution. Nawal El Saadawi addresses this fear in her research and points out more specifically its consequences in relation to the behavior of girls and women in response to this fear.

Nawal El Saadawi continues to dedicate her life to empowering the lives of women through her writing and political activism. Her works of fiction fall in line with her memoirs and autobiographical works in that her anger against corrupt leaders worldwide—but particularly against the regime in her homeland—fuels and inspires her dedication. While El Saadawi has the freedom to camouflage herself behind her fictional characters within her novels and create a world through literary art that shifts the focus from herself and onto her characters, she foregoes this luxury in her memoirs as she locates herself as both subject and object, both witness and victim. The theme throughout all of her literary works continues to be the belief that improvement in the lives of women in the global South is possible, echoed in the words of

Fedwa Malti-Douglas: “Their [oppressed women’s] liberation will come about only through the destruction of the patriarch” (*Men, Women, and God(s)* 90).

Chapter Five

Walking Through Trauma, Again and Again:
Nawal El Saadawi as Memoirist and Witness to Violence

> In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation (Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Decolonising the Mind* 9).

Through her novels, critical essays, and memoir, Nawal El Saadawi weaves a common thread of the significance writing has had in her life as a whole and more specifically in her roles as international activist and human rights advocate. Often in her commentary on her own writing, El Saadawi elaborates on the process of writing and its importance for her overall philosophy. Inherent within the interconnection between her life experiences and her writing process are the acts of violence against women that she begins to witness in her medical practice that continue through ongoing research she conducts, even into her prison sentence. In her memoir entitled *Walking Through Fire* as well as in *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, El Saadawi emphasizes how the particular form of patriarchy practiced in Egypt can potentially jeopardize the physical, emotional, and, arguably, spiritual well-being of women, causing trauma. Nawal El Saadawi relives this trauma as she writes memoir. However, the aesthetics of her writing process, and the ways in which she walks the reader through her resistance of societal acceptance of certain forms of violence against women, create multiple layers of trauma for El Saadawi primarily as witness, but also as victim.

Nawal El Saadawi's writing embodies Thiong'o's personification of the power of language in that she uses her writing to empower not only herself, but those who have been systematically denied access to a better quality of life which often includes a denial of civil and human rights. In addition to the above epigraph, Thiong'o further writes of his mastery of

English that, “Language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds . . . Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture” (12-13). While Thiong’o suggests that his formation of identity through language is an inevitable yet coincidental element of language acquisition, El Saadawi approaches the writing process more intentionally as she contemplates the craft of her writing. She embraces the idea that the views she expresses in her critical essays and the acts of violence she witnesses and writes of in her memoirs will have far-reaching effects for exposing to her readership the injustices of patriarchy and of corrupt governmental practice. This consequence appears—especially in her fiction analyzed in the previous chapter—to be even more of a priority to El Saadawi than recording the events of her individual life within the memoirs.

El Saadawi acknowledges both in her critical essays and in her memoirs that the process of writing has been crucial to her survival for a number of reasons. She admits to an intense relationship to the writing process that she embraces at times and resists at others. El Saadawi often serves as a witness to acts of violence or the effects of those acts on the patients she serves in her medical practice. While at the same time she realizes the significance of including these experiences in her memoirs for decreasing the existing myths about Arab women, the task of writing about them is no less difficult. Dori Laub writes that a “loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one’s history is abolished, one’s identity ceases to exist as well” (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 67). El Saadawi takes upon herself the task of recording her personal history through memoir while simultaneously including her commentary on the corrupt system of the Egyptian government on the lives of the people, especially women, because she understands the necessity

of offering to her readership her perspective on the patriarchal society in which she lives and writes and how injustices impact the quality of life within a society. As her individual identity evolves, chapter by chapter, her writing weaves itself into a communal identity of the greater history of the lives of the people—including her personal relationships and her medical patients—in her literary work.

Thus, throughout her fiction, memoirs, and critical essays, El Saadawi expresses anger and disappointment over the politics of globalization and human rights violations and social and psychological repercussions on its victims, especially women. As a preface for *A Map of Hope*, an anthology on the writings of women during times of political unrest, Marjorie Agosin writes that

> At times of great political repression, literature acquires a powerful function: It legitimizes artistic expression. Women writers, through their words and stories, manage to reaffirm what the greater society has denied. Paradoxically, if patriarchal societies have historically denied the presence of women writers, and also those who write about politics, the existence of extreme conditions due to political and civil violence has allowed these women writers to create and through their texts become visible (xxii).

Writing as a form of expression has served multiple purposes for El Saadawi, including many of those mentioned by Agosin. Agosin suggests that the values of patriarchy justify the reason for denying women publication and representation within the field of literature. She also attributes the necessity of producing women's writing to the civil conflict or conditions of war which inspires her collection of writings. Nawal El Saadawi is included in this anthology because through her writing she embodies the daily fear women experience due to the potential threat of violence during times of war or political unrest as well as the more private acts of rape or domestic violence that women are commonly subjected to, often within their own homes.

El Saadawi navigates the public/private dichotomy in her novels and non-fiction such as in *The Hidden Face of Eve*—discussed in the previous chapter—by connecting the predicament

of a woman in the global South to her local community and, ultimately, to her own experiences. El Saadawi often admits to the tension of writing about witnessing acts of violence and the larger injustices of society, a resistance that she illustrates through the tone of her writing, especially in her memoirs and critical essays. In *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe that, "For some narrators, the problem of recalling and re-creating a past life involves organizing the inescapable but often disabling force of memory and negotiating its fragmentary intrusions with increasing, if partial, understanding. For some, language fails to capture, or engage, or mediate the horrors of the past and the aftereffects of survival" (27-28). The primary vehicle through which El Saadawi combats a sense of hopelessness often associated with trauma is through writing. Throughout her memoirs and critical essays, El Saadawi emphasizes the necessity of writing both in her personal life and in her social activism as an agent of change in improving the livelihoods of all people, such as when she states in the *Nawal El Saadawi Reader*, "The power of creative action protects the individual involved from the oppression of authority, strengthens her in the face of crises, and lifts her above personal ambitions, ideological struggles, and religious, sectarian, tribal, and sexual prejudices" (215). Thus, the purpose of writing the memoir is to not only narrate important events in the author's life, but also to stand as a memorial to the women whose lives have been sacrificed in the name of upholding patriarchal law. As a secondary (or perhaps primary) additional purpose, the memoir serves as a testimony to human rights violations predicated upon women by interpretations of religious law by supporters of patriarchy. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith explain this phenomenon as follows: "For rights discourse to become activated, victims need to come forward and testify to their experience. Their testimony brings into play, implicitly or explicitly, a rights claim. The teller bears witness to his or her own experience through acts of remembering elicited by rights

activists and coded to rights instruments. These acts of remembering test the values that nations profess to live by against the actual experiences and perceptions of the storyteller as witness" (3). Nawal El Saadawi's anger against a corrupt Egyptian government and its Western counterparts inspire many of her critical essays. As such, her memoirs take on the characteristics of a testimony as the need to bear witness becomes her secondary goal.

The western audience that El Saadawi critiques so heavily is a major factor in the popularity of not only her memoir, but many autobiographical works that have been produced since the World Trade Center attack of 2001and its subsequent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and, indirectly, even Palestine. As new developments continue to unfold in evolving governmental structures in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, hopefully many of the stereotypes of Islamic culture and religion will decrease. In all fairness, there has also been an increase in the number of memoirs and other forms of autobiographical works published by American writers as well. However, there has been a particularly disturbing voyeurism in the commodification of the life writing of women who hail from the Middle East and other parts of Asia and Africa where more traditional forms of patriarchy compromise the civil and human rights of women. In fact, *Walking Through Fire* was published in 2002, both in its original Arabic and in the English translation. Although the first Nawal El Saadawi reader was published in 1995, two other critical editions have been published in 1997 and 2010, respectively. Other renowned cultural commentators in transnational and postcolonial studies have made similar observations to El Saadawi's regarding the public image of women in the Arabic world. Well-known for her outspokenness on the effects of globalization in the neo-colonial world, Gayatri Spivak notes that, "The upwardly mobile exmarginal, *justifiably* searching for validation, can help commodify marginality" (170). With an increased focus on the activity of the Taliban and its treatment of

women as an inaccurate representation of the lives of women in all parts of the Middle East, the other end of the double-edged sword is the fascination with the extremities of acts of violence committed against women which is commonly a theme in much of women's life writings from this region. Earlier in her work, Spivak makes note of the disillusion of representation of women of the global South in the academy:

> Thus, even as we feminist critics discover the troping error of the masculinist truth-claim to universality or academic objectivity, we perform the lie of constituting a truth of global sisterhood where the mesmerizing model remains male and female sparring partners of generalizable or universalizable sexuality who are the chief protagonists in that European contest. In order to claim sexual difference where it makes a difference, global sisterhood must receive this articulation even if the sisters in question are Asian, African, Arab. Or so some of us had thought. In today's atmosphere of triumphalist globalization, where the old slogan of 'Women in Development' has been blithely changed into 'Gender and Development,' and a hard-hatted white woman points the way to a smiling Arab woman in ethnic dress upon a World Bank publicity pamphlet, such utopianism is consigned to the future anterior (148).

Spivak's tongue-in-cheek observation of the traditional western approach to feminist scholars of color is indicative of the approach to women's life writing as well. As Spivak suggests, the condescending nature of an insincere attempt at inclusion becomes dangerous when coupled with an assumption that individual perspectives or experiences within an autobiography or memoir are true of all the members of the demographic the writer represents. While one of Nawal El Saadawi's goals in writing her memoirs is to include a commentary on a range of subjects from globalization to gender inequalities and human rights violations, she also weaves throughout her story the idea that her experiences—although similar in many ways to women of less privilege—are not representative of the culture as a whole. To contextualize El Saadawi's memoirs in light of her perspective as a privileged individual is necessary to avoid the commodification that unjustly marginalizes women in the ways Spivak suggests.

Spivak also comments on the effects of this commodification and how the misrepresentation further endangers the livelihoods of women of the global South: "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman

disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development" (304). Although Spivak's observation is similar in scope to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, in a footnote to her own work Spivak more specifically makes a connection to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the lack of matrilineal discontinuity from Sethe's mother to Denver (305). Within a global context, the same disconnect from Sethe's African mother to Sethe (neither African nor American, as Spivak points out) to the African-American Denver also occurs from one generation to the next as writers and human rights activists such as Nawal El Saadawi challenge the cultural norms that enable violence against women to continue. Still, the psychological effects of Ellison's "invisibility"—the injustices a people can suffer as a result of their humanity going unrecognized—are highlighted in Spivak's statement, especially the "violent shuttling" that can occur when tradition is challenged by modernization and the livelihoods of women improve as a result.

However, the context of the current globalized society causes a divergence from Ellison's concept of invisibility and the rights to citizenship that did not exist during the post-World War II/ post-Holocaust era in which *Invisible Man* was originally published. From a feminist perspective, a lack of economic resources is an inevitable factor in the compromise of women's civil and human rights. Spivak further writes that,

> The disenfranchised woman of the diaspora—new and old—cannot, then, engage in the *critical* agency of civil society—citizenship in the robust sense—to fight the depredations of 'global economic citizenship.' Thus *we* do not ignore her suffering upon some impossible hierarchy of political correctness, and *we* desist from guilt-tripping her. For her struggle is for access to the subjectship of the civil society of her new state: basic civil rights. Escaping from the failure of decolonization at home and abroad, she is not yet so secure in the state of desperate choice or chance as to even conceive of ridding her mind of the burden of transnationality (400-401, my emphasis).

Even more interesting than Spivak's point regarding the goal of women in the global South to be considered equal and competitive—being capable of truly participatory citizenship—is the plural

first-person narrator she utilizes to express her point. Not only does Spivak take herself out of the group—indeed, because of her renowned status she is not disenfranchised in the same sense as many—but her use of the collective first person narrator effectively objectifies the predicament of the women to whom she refers. Even as women cross transnational boundaries and therefore attempt to combat the stereotypes of their commodified image, they are aware of their status that subconsciously influences their potential for advancement. This inability to "rid her mind of the burden" is also present in the traumatized victims of violence that Nawal El Saadawi witnesses to and writes about in *Walking Through Fire*. Like Spivak, one of El Saadawi's goals in writing the memoir is to denounce the stereotypes, the commodification, and the denial of women's human rights within a neo-colonial globalized climate. El Saadawi's makes similar observations to Spivak's in many of her critical essays, based upon her international travel and observations.

Fedwa Malti-Douglas offers her perspective on the commodification of Nawal El Saadawi's work specifically as she attempts to defend many of the accusations leveled against El Saadawi, primarily because of her style of fiction writing but also because of her political views. Malti-Douglas rhetorically asks

> Does the frankly polemical force of so much of El Saadawi's work mean that it is somehow not fully literary? The debate over art and the politically engaged writer is an old one. Dr. Nawal El Saadawi is clearly an *engage* writer. Readers (and critics) may certainly disagree about the literary qualities of her work. But to deny artistic status because of her engagement in the cause of women is to oppose this cause, and, in effect, to contribute to the maintenance of existing gender relations both in the Middle East and in the West ("Feminism Beside Itself" 292-293).

Like Spivak, Malti-Douglas alludes to the status quo and its destructive nature in attempts to advance the cause of women's human rights. Malti-Douglas also addresses critics of the quality of El Saadawi's fiction in particular and, without dismissing the validity of questioning the quality of any one work, she draws attention to a more significant aspect of the purpose of El

Saadawi's writing. Unfortunately, this is also the aspect of the writing that is most often misinterpreted among western audiences and opponents of feminism in the global South.

Nawal El Saadawi herself admits to a passionate desire for human rights, especially for women in Egypt and expresses her perspective not only in her fictional works, but in her non-fiction essays as well. In a presentation to a United Nations Institute seminar, El Saadawi reports that, "The power of creative action protects the individual involved from the oppression of authority, strengthens her in the face of crises, and lifts her above personal ambitions, ideological struggles, and religious, sectarian, tribal, and sexual prejudices" (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 215). Understanding El Saadawi's philosophy regarding human rights is essential in considering her goal in writing the memoirs. While being fully aware of the attempts that have been made on her own life, she makes this statement to an audience of activists as a means of inspiring their creativity and bravery. This message of hope is necessary for an audience of human rights advocates as they go forth to continue to fight against injustices such as physical and sexual violence against women.

Struggling against social injustice is an underlying theme throughout *Walking Through Fire,* and Nawal El Saadawi expertly weaves her philosophy and political beliefs into the narration of her experiences. Just as Toni Morrison emphasizes the significance of location for victims of trauma in both "The Site of Memory" and in *Beloved,* El Saadawi opens her first chapter with a description of her setting. However, the symbolism of the setting itself is problematic. El Saadawi writes that, "It is spring. A flood of green is sweeping over Duke forest. The sky, turquoise blue, carries me back to my village. I am in North Carolina, a southern state on the East Coast of America, in a small town called Durham. People in Durham look up at the sky and say this is Carolina blue" (1). Juxtaposed against the serenity of her setting in Durham,

however, is the history of a city credited as the location of the first sit-in of the Civil Rights Movement on June 23, 1957 (Wikipedia.com). For El Saadawi to find solace years later in the same city is not necessarily ironic, however this sit-in occurred only months after the resistance movements El Saadawi would become involved with in her own country of origin (*Walking Through Fire* 89). El Saadawi is granted political asylum upon invitation as a visiting Professor at Duke University, yet the coincidence of her strong conviction to civil rights among people of her own generation in a city that carries so much history of change in the once-segregated South ties in to both her political philosophy and the peacefulness she requires to be able to write the memoir. Even the color of the sky reminds her of her village, suggesting that Durham carries for her a familiarity to her native village that brings her full circle as the appropriate setting for the life-writing process. El Saadawi makes no mention of Durham's history within the Civil Rights Movement in her memoir, however the city as a "site of memory" serves as both a context and a foreshadowing of the stories of social injustice she would unveil throughout the narrative.

Early in this first chapter, she rather abruptly interrupts a narrative comparing her current surroundings in Durham to her permanent home in Cairo to explain the significance that writing has had on her life. In her explanation, she highlights connections between time, place, religion, and death:

> My memoirs, written on sheets of grayish paper, keep piling up on my desk. After leaving Egypt I started to write. The threat of death seemed to give my life a new importance, made it worth writing about. I felt that the closer I moved towards death, the greater became the value of my life. Nothing can defeat death like writing. Were it not for the Old Testament, Moses and Judaism would not have lived on. Were it not for the New Testament, Jesus Christ and Christianity would have died off long ago. And were it not for the Qur'an, the prophet Muhammad and Islam would not have survived to this day. Is that why writing was forbidden to women and slaves? (3)

El Saadawi marks the definitive time period of beginning to write her memoir as "after leaving Egypt," indicating that her environment in the southern region of the United States provides her with an environment conducive to writing memoir that did not exist within the form of patriarchy

characteristic of Egypt, where the "threat of death" existed, possibly referring to her need for political asylum. Because of the multiple, constant threats on her life (in fact, this first chapter is entitled "The Threat"), El Saadawi considers the possibility of her assassination more carefully than most and, at the same time, the ability to immortalize herself through publication, hence her conviction that "Nothing can defeat death like writing." The connection between women and religion appears to be the oddest analogy in this passage, yet placing women and slaves in the same predicament is not surprising considering El Saadawi's philosophy, especially regarding the plight of married women. Yet inherent within this final, rhetorical question is also the suggestion of the opposite which is inevitably that, because writing is *not* forbidden to her as a woman, that she is instead liberated through her fiction, essays, and memoirs. While she acknowledges that most women within economically and politically oppressed environments have fewer options than she, El Saadawi does not remove herself from the group targeted for oppression. Carolyn Heilbrun analyzes the connection among multiple oppressing forces by stating, "Patriarchal oppression interacts with race and class, and male violence, like oppression related to religion or sexual preference, cuts across all races and classes . . . the special circumstances of . . . 'privileged' women have made them particularly likely sources for the rise of a new feminine consciousness" (63). El Saadawi's passion for a better quality of life for oppressed populations drives the narrative and her opening explanation for writing the memoir synthesizes her beliefs regarding multiple oppressions. Nawal El Saadawi has indeed been one of the pioneers of feminism as an advocate for women's human rights.

Nonetheless, the threat of death continues to haunt her and actually sets the tone for the entire memoir. As previously mentioned, the title of her first chapter, "The Threat," creates a paradigm for the atmosphere in which she is able to even begin writing the memoir. She

contrasts the calm atmosphere of small-town North Carolinian life to the fear of living in her apartment in Cairo that was under surveillance because of the threats on her life and how this fear stifled her writing process:

> This time death kept haunting me from the moment the guards were put in front of my house. Not a day went by without my hearing the words 'death-list' mentioned in front of me . . . Almost every day the bodyguard would ring the bell and tell us that they had caught a stranger trying to come up to my flat. Every time the door-bell rang I imagined the assassin standing outside. *I could not write with the fear of death hanging over my head* . . . I would stop in the middle of a line or a word, the pen arrested in its movement. Sherif [El Saadawi's husband] would raise his head and look at me, then ask, 'Nawal, what's wrong?' 'I can't write, Sherif, *my mind has been paralysed'* (18, my emphasis).

Trauma resulting from the very real threat of death upon the author's life made it impossible for her to engage in the process of writing the memoir. The need to justify early in the narrative her reasons for political asylum helps the reader to understand her very deep commitment to social justice as well as the factors contributing to her memories of violence or the threat of violence, her trauma, and her dedication to the writing process.

Exemplified in her passion against injustice is also El Saadawi's commitment to join the revolution in her country. Like Mamphela Ramphele, Nawal El Saadawi describes with great pride her participation in the resistance movement in her country in the early days of her medical practice. As a medical practitioner with a strong commitment to justice, freedom, equality, and democracy, El Saadawi dedicated her energy and resources to the Egyptian resistance of the October 1956 invasion of England, France, and Israel. She writes, "I took off my doctor's coat and put on fatigues . . . the health unit was transformed into a training camp for armed struggle" (89). She connects the 1956 armed conflict with a prior resistance movement from her teenage years and again connects the two incidents: ". . . in my heart was a wound that never healed, the face of Ahmed Menissi now dead, the voice of Ahmed Helmi coming to me as though from the bottom of a pit" (89). Not only is she fueled by her dual roles as political activist and doctor, but again as with traumatized victims, the threat of death is ever present. In addition, trauma and

memory once again emerge in her writing process as a past event merges with the present, hence the "wound that never healed." As she describes how the revolutionary activity invigorates her, she also immediately connects her revolutionary activity to mothering her infant child as if there is a natural connection between the two. She also draws attention to a criticism of her child's caretaker Om Ibrahim. El Saadawi is disturbed when Ob Ibrahim observes, "'Doctor, you stand on your feet all day long and now in addition we have this training camp. May Allah help you to overcome all your enemies and above all that man called Khairallah . . . He should pick up a rifle, and go off to fight instead of hiding here like a woman'" (91). El Saadawi corrects her by saying, "'How can you say that when you are yourself a woman? It's an insult to both you and me since you and I are both women'" (91). In this exchange, El Saadawi expresses her disdain for the institutionalized stigma of weakness unconsciously attached to women. Within the span of a few pages, El Saadawi merges her discussion of revolutionary activity, mothering, and feminist ideology to construct a paradigm for her overall advocacy for human rights.

El Saadawi's commitment to ending violence against women in all its forms is evident in the episodes of her life that she chooses to include in the memoir. One particularly disturbing example in *Walking Through Fire* of how societal law contributed to the death of a young girl is El Saadawi's story of Masouda Zeidan, a patient in El Saadawi's care. El Saadawi dedicates an entire chapter of her memoir to Masouda, not surprisingly entitled "What is Suppressed Always Comes Back." El Saadawi describes her attempt to protect Masouda from her husband's abuse by keeping her safe in the medical facility and all of the cultural and religious justifications of why she was unable to do so. After several attempts at suicide, Masouda's father finally brought the young girl to the medical facility and left her in El Saadawi's care. After her professional evaluation, El Saadawi wrote the following into her medical report:

> 'The patient Masouda Zeidan is suffering from a psychological disorder, in which she goes

> through fits similar in some ways to epilepsy, and in which she loses consciousness. She should be kept under supervision in [the] hospital for some time until her condition improves. I recommend that she be separated from her husband. He is the cause of her malady. He is fifty years older than she is, beats her viciously every night, and violates her sexually by forcing her to undergo anal intercourse when she bows down to do her prayers . . . When examined, the patient showed signs of severe chronic inflammation with multiple ulcers around the anal orifice, resulting from the force used by a grown man to introduce his male organ into the anus of a small girl [Masouda was twelve when she married], and the almost nightly repetition of such violence for a period of almost five years. The girl found no other way of escape except through mental disease (111).

Each observation excerpted from the evaluation highlights a different aspect of Masouda's physical and sexual abuse that, in turn, leads to insanity. El Saadawi diagnoses the mental illness as temporary, however, because she later reports that Masouda begged the doctor to allow her to remain in the medical facility and that Masouda "had slipped into the life of the hospital, and her mind was now perfectly clear. The inflammations and ulcers which had given her so much pain were completely healed. Now she talked with the patients, smiled and even laughed. Her face radiated with a new hope" (111).

In spite of significant improvement in her mental and physical state, unfortunately "Masouda [became] the victim of a 'legal violation' within the marriage law" as El Saadawi was unable to keep her husband or the authorities from coming to take her back to her home (115). Masouda jumped into the Nile River and thus committed suicide in an attempt to free herself from the abusive environment after being forced out of the medical facility where the environment was so much more conducive to a healthier psychological and emotional state. El Saadawi calls upon both mythology and religious law to question the origins of patriarchy that contributed to Masouda's death by writing, "After a period of about two thousand years the greatest crime became to worship a god other than the God of Moses, whereas injustice became a minor sin. I began to ask myself how this change had come about. Was it linked to a new order in which the female goddesses had been replaced by one male god?" (116). In addition to referencing religion as a potential cause of the confusion which would lead to the young girl's

suicide, El Saadawi questions the codes of conduct within patriarchal law that would force Masouda to return to a violent spouse after experiencing the comfort of a safe environment. This episode within the memoir is an example like no other of the severity of injustice El Saadawi combats in both her medical practice and her political activism.

The chapter's title is introspective as well. Masouda's predicament forces El Saadawi into a suppressed memory of two young girls among her personal acquaintances:

> In my memory there remained the image of the small servant-girl, Saadeya, fleeing our home after my mother had beaten her . . . Somehow her image and that of Masouda became linked in my mind . . . Her voice [Masouda's] reminded me of Shalabeya, the young servant-girl in my grandfather's house . . . She was only fourteen years old but my aunt [sic] Fahima had taken her off to the railway station and left her there to fend for herself . . . In my memory Masouda and Shalabeya remained linked . . . Shalabeya the victim of an 'illegal violation' and Masouda the victim of a 'legal violation' within the marriage law (103-104).

Witnessing violence against women becomes a source of trauma for El Saadawi from early in her life which causes her to make such links between unrelated incidents, separated by both time and distance. The significance of the two episodes she refers to from her childhood, however, is that both violations were initiated not by males, but by women in her family—her mother and aunt, respectively. Thus, the concept of human rights violations in El Saadawi's mind is larger than merely an issue of male violence against women. It is also incorporated into cultural belief systems that dictate the treatment of women across lines of socioeconomic class. An indication of the "unspeakable" nature of the injustices against the three young girls is not only the repetition of the fact that they are linked in El Saadawi's mind, but also that within the process of writing the memoir El Saadawi reminds the reader of these linkages without explaining why these connections exist. Hence, "What is Suppressed Always Comes Back" not only for Masouda—whose trauma became more intense upon returning to her husband's house after her brief period of happiness and freedom—but also for El Saadawi and her "rememory" as she

relives the trauma of witnessing violence against women from separate time periods within her life through the process of writing memoir.

The doctor/patient relationship between Nawal El Saadawi and Masouda exemplifies that of witness to victim as El Saadawi recounts in her memoir the impact this particular incident has had on her sense of justice, especially in her tension upon reliving the trauma and admitting to such vulnerability after Masouda's body had been discovered. El Saadawi recalls, "I stood helpless on the bank of the river wearing my white coat, my arms hanging uselessly at my side amidst a crowd of helpless women who, dressed in their black *gallabeyas*, watched as Masouda was pulled out of the water" (113). In this passage, El Saadawi senses a connection to the community of women, all of whom feel a "helplessness" against the injustices of societal law that Masouda's suicide represents, although she in her "white coat" is separated from the rural women in their "black *gallabeyas*." Marjorie Agosin notes that "To write under adversity is to actively resist pain and betrayal, but it is also a form of denying horror" (xxiii). In El Saadawi's writing, she does not deny the horror, but instead embraces it. Cathy Caruth quotes Bessel Van der Kolk that, "With regard to trauma, the use of the term 'repression' evokes the image of a subject actively pushing the unwanted traumatic memory away. Personal consciousness stays in its place, as it were; it is the traumatic memory that is removed" (Caruth 168). The writing process thus becomes traumatic for El Saadawi as she gravitates *toward* the traumatic experience as opposed to resisting it, and she admits to the challenges of writing about violence against women in its multiple forms in many of her critical essays.

In the memoir, Nawal El Saadawi notes several instances of the injustices of inadequate health care among the villagers as well. In The Village Doctor," a chapter that precedes "What is Suppressed Always Comes Back," El Saadawi describes the futility of expecting traditional

healers to embrace the practice of formal medicine. She writes that "The *dayas* [female circumcisers] and village barbers started to campaign against me, so I organized health education sessions for them in the health unit. But it was like trying to inflate a balloon that was torn" (88). Because of a commitment to traditions and customs, rural residents were hesitant to accept the dangers of traditional medicine which, practiced incorrectly, could cause more harm than good. El Saadawi lists a series of incidents she witnesses during her tenure in residence in the rural region consisting of Tahla, Kafr Tahla, Digwa, and Al-Ramla (73). She describes her anger over the following incidents:

> One day I caught a village barber giving an injection to a woman through the cloth of her *gallabeya* so as not to expose her thigh. I protested and told him off. 'How can you do something like that? Don't you realize you can give her a serious infection!' He answered, 'What can I do, doctor? She doesn't want to show her thigh' . . . At a wedding ceremony, the fingernail of a bridegroom penetrated into the bladder of his young bride when he tried to deflorate her. They carried her to the health unit on the back of a donkey and I repaired the organs that had been damaged . . . Bleeding after female circumcision was very common and even commoner was infection since *dayas* did not sterilize their instruments (mainly a razor) and did not disinfect the wound. Often they used dust to stop the bleeding (88).

In all fairness, El Saadawi also cites in this chapter an example of a male baby who suffered from a circumcision gone awry as well. However, it is her examples of practices involving suggested religious beliefs and marriage rituals involving the health status of women that carry the stigma of societal injustices and call into serious question the society's views on the value of women's lives. In the first example, El Saadawi is outraged over the local healer's lack of knowledge of the possibility of infection. Yet, she is equally or even moreso) angered at the woman's insistence to not reveal her body to a male outside of her family and thus compromise her virtue according to cultural and/or religious law. Larger than this one incident are the numerous lives of women that are lost as a result of similar obedience to cultural law, and El Saadawi has dedicated a significant amount of her career to advocating for changes in the cultural practices that compromise women's health and safety. Death is unfortunately the result

of some of these practices, especially in the cases in which no woman medical practitioner is available to serve female patients who refuse to be treated by male doctors (or whose families refuse to have them treated by males).

Curiously, El Saadawi's tone in the last two examples is not nearly as judgmental as in the first. There is more remorse than anger in her approach to the bridegroom's ritual or the female circumcision. As stated in Chapter Four, Nawal El Saadawi opens *The Hidden Face of Eve* with a vivid description of her own circumcision as a young girl, an episode that haunts her and inspires her advocacy against the practice of female circumcision in addition to her campaign against other forms of violence against women in the global South. Her discomfort in elaborating on these issues is an indication of the pain caused by these events in her personal life, a trauma too intense to revisit through the process of writing the memoir.

Throughout *Walking Through Fire*, Nawal El Saadawi continues to comment on her complex relationship to writing. Toward the end of her memoir, she explains,

> I am seated at my desk trying to write. I want to finish the last part of my memoirs but I am not making any progress. Sherif [her husband] reads the newspapers every morning then sits at his desk and begins to work on his novel. I do not know how he is able to move so easily from reading the newspapers to writing a novel. If I read the newspapers I have to wait one or two days before the tension disappears, before my anger subsides so that I can resume my writing. I have to forget that the wars are going on, the children are being killed, the declarations of peace made by the leaders who send tanks against them, and their faces looking out at me from the front page . . . (219).

El Saadawi's writing process is affected by the injustices and acts of violence she witnesses on an international level. Characteristic of trauma victims, El Saadawi could be potentially re-living injustices she had experienced earlier in life as a medical doctor. She describes her recollection as "tension" and "anger," both common among trauma victims. El Saadawi admits that her writing process is interrupted by injustices similar to what she has witnessed. Ironically, many of

her novels and critical essays are inspired by the atrocities and crimes against humanity that she resists during her writing process.

Perhaps El Saadawi's imprisonment increased her sense of mortality and inevitable death more than any other episode in her career because of her lack of control over her surroundings while incarcerated in addition to the injustice of the governmental regime that landed her in the al-Qanatir Women's Prison. Even more powerfully than in *Walking Through Fire*, in *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* El Saadawi expresses her passion for the writing process and its necessity for her livelihood. The memoir opens with "a knock at the door" for officers who come for her arrest (1). As she ignores the knock, she informs the reader that small interruptions "torture" her while she is in the process of writing a new novel. She then personifies the novel (or perhaps, more accurately, the process of writing it) as she describes her connection to it:

> This novel is tormenting me. I've freed myself completely to write it, letting everything else go for its sake. It's intractable, like unattainable love. It wants me, my entire being, mind and body, and if it can't have that it will not give itself to me at all. It wants all or nothing—it's exactly like me. To the extent that I give to it, it gives to me. It wants no competition for my heart and mind—not that of a husband, nor a son or daughter, nor preoccupation with work of any sort, not even on behalf of the women's cause (1).

In saying that she and the novel are one and the same, El Saadawi illustrates the intimacy with which she engages the writing process. Nonetheless, El Saadawi makes clear that she feels attacked by the knock on the door, a violation on both her privacy and her writing process: "There is violation in the arrest. There is violation in the writing of the memoirs itself. There is even violation in the literary techniques" (*Men, Women, and God(s)* 163). El Saadawi makes so much of this initial intrusion as she "repeatedly, obsessively" refers to it throughout the memoir that in some ways it represents the worst trespass because of the shock it causes her, adding to the trauma of this episode in her life (Harlow, *Resistance Literature* 138). Equally as symbolic is the fact that "the door to her apartment which the members of Sadat's secret service had smashed remained, even after her release from prison, ajar" (*Resistance Literature* 140). As a source of

trauma, the intrusion at the door and its lack of closure symbolizes the inability of the trauma victim to heal herself from the traumatic episode. The door remains open just as the wound it caused goes unhealed, further indicated by the words with which El Saadawi ends the prison narrative: "As soon as I meet one of them anywhere at all [one of her fellow prisoners] . . . we embrace and remember the days of prison—as if there is something about prison which one misses, or as if the comradeship of prison cannot be forgotten and cannot die. And who knows, *perhaps it will return"* (197, my emphasis). El Saadawi and her fellow inmates developed a comradeship within an environment fraught with fear, uncertainty, and deplorable living conditions. Just as El Saadawi acted on a commitment to improve the living conditions of those who were still imprisoned after her release, she also continues to have an attachment when she encounters any one of the women with whom she shared a cell. Seeing the women brings the return of memories of a fear and uncertainty so intense that El Saadawi fears it "cannot die," and in some ways she expects that it will not. The belief that a painful memory will revisit a victim is characteristic of the classic definition of trauma, and in many instances throughout both *Walking Through Fire* and *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* El Saadawi expresses seemingly unrelated events to each other from as early as her childhood into her adulthood.

Hence, death and the uncertainty of survival follow El Saadawi throughout her detention in the prison. During moments of despair, her will to live grows ever stronger, empowered by the community of women surrounding her. The spirit of revolution through protest inspires much of her writing and research, and in this same vein she writes of her feelings of despair in prison:

> Our circumstances inside the prison would sink to a new low, and we would hear news prophesying danger. Pessimism would darken the faces of all of the prisoners with me in the cell, and every one of us would feel surrounded by the most horrific dangers. We would sit together, silent, grave, pessimistic. Yet, something would move inside me suddenly, something built into me, the rebel, angry and revolting against this gravity, this submission to worry and grief. Rebelling against passivity and lack of movement, resisting defeat and pessimism, so that I would say: 'We will not die, or if we are to die we won't die silently, we won't go off in the night without a row, we must rage and rage, we must beat the ground and make it shudder. We won't die without a revolution!' (36)

The existential philosophy of one who comes close to death but does not die is essential in El Saadawi's thinking during the times of despair that she refers to when the prisoners' survival was questionable. Her will to live is commendable, yet her fascination with death potentially results from her memories of witnessing death or from its results through her medical practice. Also within her everyday life she acknowledges a political climate that does not actively promote the value or equality of women.

On a more positive note, El Saadawi also describes how the writing process has sustained her throughout her life. She interrupts her narration of events in the prison memoir to explain how writing is crucial to maintaining her sanity through traumatic memories of witnessing violence and other forms of injustice:

> It is just as if I were striking blows with the pen at a corrupt, black head[1] which wanted to abduct my freedom and life, to deform my true self, and to force me to sell my mind and to say yes when I want to say no. Over the ground, my fingers sketch letters and interlacing circles. My hand trembles with anger, and my heartbeat quickens. If my fingers had not come to know the pen, perhaps they would have known the hoe. The pen is the most valuable thing in my life. My words on paper are more valuable than my children, more than my husband, more than my freedom. I prefer my place in prison to writing something which has not originated in my mind. The sincere word demands a courage akin to that needed to kill—and perhaps more (*Memoirs from the Women's Prison* 116).

The violent images Nawal El Saadawi alludes to here are typical of trauma victims and a will to endure hardship and adversity when the threat of death is ever present. Inspired by all she witnessed and at times experienced, El Saadawi intimately reflects on discriminatory practices against women prisoners, the fact that her publications caused her incarceration in the first place, and the changes in public policy that could gradually become reality as public perception changes. In this passage she expresses her views on the power of writing to fight against

[1] In this passage, El Saadawi explains the affinity she feels toward Fathiyya-the-Murderess who killed her husband with a gardening hoe after years of physical abuse and ultimately witnessing him rape their daughter. When she writes that she would have "known the hoe," the suggestion here is that writing saved her from also murdering those who oppress her.

injustice. The recent fall of the Hosni Mubarak regime—as its symbolism spreads throughout northern Africa and the Middle East—represents a prophecy fulfilled from El Saadawi's earlier literary work.

El Saadawi describes an episode of her intense relationship to writing from a more concentrated time period in her life in *Memoirs from the Women's Prison.* As she describes events leading up to her arrest, she writes, "The morning papers lay untouched on the small table. He [Sherif] had gone out early and had not read them. He is in the habit of reading the papers in the morning, whereas I leave them until evening. If I read them in the morning, the lies ruin my mood and I lose the tranquility necessary for the novel" (7). Although her two memoirs were written at different periods in the author's life, El Saadawi acknowledges once again how reading about acts of injustice—possibly forcing her to involuntarily make connections with memories of her traumatic experiences—can cause a mental block in her writing process.

However, she also admits to a loneliness common among trauma victims:

> Medicine provided me with facts, knowledge, and living experience, whereas art gave me vision, clarity, courage to express my views, a love of freedom and justice, and a hatred for human bondage and oppression. However the simultaneous practice of medicine and art sometimes made me feel the difficulty of the path I was following, a lonely path over which I moved as a solitary figure (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 217).

The inherently solitary nature of the writing process feeds further into a state of loneliness compounded by a state of trauma because of the memoir form in which El Saadawi wrote *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*. The memoir form breeds introspection which, for El Saadawi, also includes the trauma of witnessing based on her experiences. Her conversations with the other prisoners added to her inspiration and newness and openness to different perspectives because of her interaction with women who had committed various crimes from theft to murder to prostitution. Ironically, she offers little detail about her fellow political prisoners who were jailed for actions similar to her own. Instead, she is more fascinated with the

women whose criminal acts had caused them to be ostracized by the larger community. Barbara Harlow writes that "Nawal al-Saadawi's [sic] concern for affiliation with her fellow inmates is thwarted by forms of dissention [sic] which divide Egyptian social life outside the prison wall and the failure on the part of the women to recognize, within the differences, political, religious, and civil, which distinguish them, their common cause in opposition to a repressive state apparatus" (*Resistance Literature* 139-140). Because of the irony of El Saadawi's visits to the al-Qanatir women's prison to interview Firdaws some eight years earlier (on whom *Woman at Point Zero* is based), the personal truly becomes political as she gains a renewed sense of advocating for women's human rights not necessarily based on her affiliation with other political prisoners, as Harlow suggests, but instead on her fascination with the murderers, thieves, and prostitutes who constituted the majority of the imprisoned population. In a separate analysis, Harlow admits that, "The hoe and the pen, the *fallaha*, or peasant women, and the intellectual, find common cause in inaugurating the outlines of a counterculture that will resist the bureaucratizing influence of the state's apparatus or repression and degradation" (*Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention* 137).

Indeed, the culture created by the fourteen women in the cell fostered a renewed sense of empowerment for El Saadawi both in her conviction as a human rights activist and as a writer of fiction and memoir. One of her fellow prisoners, Latifa, challenges the prison structure by questioning, "'Where is the law and where is the state which runs by law . . . when we are here in prison without having committed any crimes, and without any investigation? How can we be charged and imprisoned before we are tried? This is tyranny . . . and it's an abuse of human rights'" (54). As the women challenged the prison doctor Salah Bey, they simultaneously voiced their aggravation over substandard living conditions and improper detainment procedures. In this

episode, Bey represents the patriarchal force of the government that unjustifiably arrested the women and exercised unwarranted authority over the *shawisha* as she retreated under his command of her silence: "Salah exploded. 'I said, 'Quiet. Don't speak when I am present!' All of his suppressed rage came pouring out on her head, for she was merely a *shawisha* . . . He could vent his anger on her without drawing a response. Indeed, the *shawisha* recoiled and shrank against the wall" (55). The community of women empowered each other in the same spirit of resistance for which they were arrested in the first place. Not only does such strength in numbers fuel El Saadawi's motivation to fight for human rights, but also her feminist consciousness as well.

While El Saadawi gains new perspectives on her life overall as a result of her affinity to the prisoners who were imprisoned for criminal acts, Nawal El Saadawi's status as a political prisoner should not be overlooked. *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* is part of the literary corpus of prison memoirs by women, especially those who are imprisoned as a result of political action against corrupt governments, as is Angela Davis' *An Autobiography*. It is no coincidence that both El Saadawi and Davis were arrested while participating in activity in which the goal was equality for disenfranchised people of color. Davis' participation in civil rights movements caused her to be placed on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Most Wanted List while El Saadawi was placed on Egypt's list of those facing death threats. Both of these activists felt a sense of second-class citizenry in governments that did not provide equally for all of its constituents. Davis opens her autobiography with an extensive description of her incarceration; El Saadawi dedicates an entire memoir to hers. Both Davis and El Saadawi—both from relatively privileged backgrounds—served their time not in separate cells for political prisoners (which they both were) but with fellow prisoners who had committed criminal acts. Experiencing

the deplorable conditions of the jail firsthand in addition to witnessing the lives the others have led through hearing their stories has heavily influenced the memories of these two writers which may have, in turn, been a source of trauma.

Not only have Davis' and El Saadawi's memories been influenced by their experiences, but also their perspectives on the treatment of prisoners (especially women) which further fueled their civil and human rights activism upon being released. As soon as Angela Davis exited the courtroom from her trial in which the verdict was not guilty on all three charges, she held a press conference to "deploy our forces for the freedom of Ruchell, the San Quentin 6 and all other political prisoners" (*An Autobiography* 395). Although she herself had been released, Davis realized there was little time for celebration and that there was still much progress to be made toward the advancement of civil rights for people of color in the United States. As a result of her experiences, she has been advocating for the rights of prisoners throughout her career. As she writes in *If They Come in the Morning*, "A political event is reduced to a criminal event in order to reaffirm the absolute invulnerability of the existing order" (22). Political prisoners were placed in the same quarters as common criminals as a symbolic act to reinforce the totalitarian philosophy of a corrupt government. However, the political prisoners (and perhaps the other detainees as well) develop what Barbara Harlow describes as a "gradual process of collective awareness and activity" that strengthens the motivation and drive of the civil rights activists to continue to support their efforts upon release (*Resistance Literature* 152). Similar to Davis, El Saadawi returns to al-Qanatir prison the day after her release to deliver food to her fellow inmates who were still imprisoned. Not only did she deliver food, but she also confiscated messages to be delivered to the outside world: "The *shawisha* [female prison guard] bore off the cartons of food to my cellmates and returned, concealing in her bosom a folded slip of paper

which I hid in my handbag" (196). The note read as follows: "'Try as hard as you can to get the doctors to transfer us to Qasr el Aini or Demerdash Hospital'" (197). In a relentless effort to advocate for the release of her colleagues, El Saadawi reports that

> We [she and her husband Sherif] went straight to the College of Medicine at Ain Shams University. Our physician colleagues recoiled; all but one abstained from offering to help. That exception was the chairperson of the Department of Mental Diseases. He emptied a departmental room for the prisoners, and the next day they were moved from the prison to that room. After a few more days, an order of release—all of them—was issued (197).

The indication here is that El Saadawi used her professional status and membership within the field of medicine to advance the cause of the rights of the prisoners she left behind. Her mention of the only department that agreed to help the prisoners—that of mental diseases—is an implication that the chair of the department as a specialist in psychoanalytic theory and practice himself shared with El Saadawi an understanding of how powerful both injustice and trauma could be for the prisoners.

El Saadawi opens the afterword to the prison memoir with a passage that further indicates the trauma she suffers as both a victim and witness. She reflects by writing

> I wrote these memoirs after leaving prison at the end of 1981, that is, thirteen years ago. Yet it feels more like thirteen months or thirteen days; indeed, it seems just yesterday I was in that cell . . . I used to sit on the ground, leaning against one wall and facing the other, and write in my memory, without need for pen or paper. I wrote page after page in my imagination . . . By night I would reread from memory, reviewing my writing, adding sections and deleting others, as if I were putting pen to paper (199).

For El Saadawi to remember so vividly is an indication that she has yet to come to terms with the experience, no matter how many years have passed. Dually inherent in her incarceration is her belief in the publications exposing the lives of women and of writing as an act of resistance. She discusses the writing process with a determination that is reflective of her beliefs of the influence of her message to expose injustice so that improvement in the lives of women is possible. Through her body of literature, both fiction and memoir, there is a sense that her ability to

express herself has sustained her by assisting her in coming to terms with the trauma she has suffered and also in helping her to remain communally connected to the cause of human rights among disenfranchised people. She closes her afterward by writing

> But I don't feel danger, perhaps because it is a part of my life . . . And so nothing can alarm me. Writing is my life. There is no power in the world that can strip my writings from me. Since childhood a dream has inhabited my imagination: I write my words and people read them—today, tomorrow, the day after. When does not matter, for people will read them. Those are the people who make a homeland, and my homeland has become those people. (204).

While Nawal El Saadawi shares an intimate relationship to the power of writing, the process by which she produces her works is fraught with tension and painful memories that she herself refers to as traumatic. Re-living that trauma through writing is a conscious act of bravery and necessity for El Saadawi because she acknowledges the influence her fiction, critical essays, and memoirs could have in improving the lives of people in Egypt and throughout the Middle East. In fact, for this purpose she has taken on writing as a mission and acknowledges the influential nature of publication.

Nawal El Saadawi's memoirs represent a crucial place in the canon of literary texts by women of the global South. Not only do her works illustrate and expose injustices against women from her perspective, but they also serve as inspiration for activism in improving the livelihoods of the population that inspires many of her experiences in the memoirs as well as her advocacy for women's human rights. Albie Sachs writes that, "Indeed, the whole issue of women's liberation, for so long treated in an abstract way, is finally forcing itself on to the agenda of action and thought, a profound question of cultural transformation" (134). However, El Saadawi herself warns against the disillusion of believing that continuous diligence toward advancing human rights is not necessary simply because awareness of injustice has increased and certain advances have been made. In her continuing efforts to explore the interconnectedness of political activism and the power of writing, she observes that

Our struggles are becoming more and more difficult. They need more and more creativity. There are always new words emerging that we have to demystify, words such as: peace, democracy, human rights, privatization, globalization, multiculturalism, diversity, civil society, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), cultural difference, liberation theology, religious fundamentalism, postmodernism, and others. We need to discover new ways of exposing the paradoxes or double meanings in the many new and old words that are endlessly repeated. This needs greater knowledge and more understanding of modern and postmodern techniques of oppression and exploitation ("Dissidence and Creativity" 174).

Conclusion

Women's Human Rights in a New Globalized Culture

Memoir and testimony such as Ramphele's and El Saadawi's on women's experiences of witnessing trauma in the global South serve to not only offer to Western readers a perspective on women's lives, but also to inspire women within the global South toward empowerment. This empowerment may come in the form of writing, but in all cases must inevitably be linked to a means of coming to terms with current injustices against women. Bessel van der Kolk writes that, "The traumatic experience/memory is, in a sense, timeless. It is not transformed into a story, placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end (which is characteristic for narrative memory). If it can be told at all, it is still a (re)experience" (177). Memoirists such as Nawal El Saadawi and Mamphela Ramphele who are brave enough to revisit traumatic experiences they have both had and witnessed accept the challenge of the "(re) experience" while at the same time acknowledging its complications.

A number of initiatives designed to improve living conditions for women in the global South are being developed and by both federal government and non-governmental organizations. Julian Kunnie refers to the National Women's Day Conference sponsored by the South African Association for Literacy and Education as an example of the possibilities:

> An important resolution of the conference was to address the reeducation of the country's magistrates and justices who deal with issues of violence against women and 'the setting up of a special unit within the justice system, headed by a woman, to handle cases of violence against women' and 'the setting up of a movement such as 'Fathers Incorporated' to educate young men in particular to become members of a more humane society (239).

The mentalities of both women and men must be transformed in order for conditions to improve and for people of color to believe themselves deserving of human and civil rights. Mamphela Ramphele's perspective is in keeping with these efforts as she writes, "True transformation in

South Africa cannot come about without serious attention to the issue of gender" ("The Dynamics of Gender" 227). In light of the current victories in Tunisia and Egypt and ongoing efforts in Libya and throughout the Middle East and North Africa, the possibility of transformation is becoming a true reality. Ramphele accurately observes that attention to gender must be a priority if true democracy is to be achieved, both in South Africa and throughout the global South. Mamphela Ramphele expertly writes that

> A government committed to transformation would benefit from the active participation of all the citizens of the country. Such participation can only be fully realized where all people have the space to make informed choices in their lives. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, black and white, all have a contribution to make to the new South Africa. They need the freedom to choose without the constraints of race, class *and* gender differentials ("The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organizations: A Personal View" 227).

Not only must improvements be made between male/female relationships in order for conditions to improve, but also between racial and ethnic groups. In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings, Mamphela Ramphele writes

> We can talk about the Rainbow Nation as loudly as we like, but we need to confront the implications and the consequences of the fact that a large group of South Africans were made to feel subhuman. Voting in 1994 and again in 1999 did not remove those scars of humiliation, particularly as the majority of people continue to live in squalor, are unemployed and without hope. This inferiority complex is a reality in most people's lives. Until and unless we confront it, we will not succeed ("Law, Corruption and Morality" 174).

The colonial mentality that has handicapped black South Africans since apartheid must end if positive social and political improvements are to be made. The TRC made efforts to validate the lives of those who have suffered trauma through creating space for their testimonies to be heard. However, the "rememories" (to refer once again to Toni Morrison's concept of how trauma from one's past revisits the present) of those who have witnessed or suffered violence live on in the daily lives of victims and their successors. As women throughout the global South become increasingly empowered in their philosophy toward their living circumstances, a better quality of life can be achieved. However, disenfranchised people must remain aware of the effects of

trauma on their lives, their decisions, and their beliefs. Priscilla Hayner notes that, "While individual survivors struggle to rebuild shattered lives, to ease the burning memory of torture suffered or massacres witnessed, society as a whole must find a way to move on, to create a livable space of national peace, build some form of reconciliation between former enemies, and secure these events in the past" (2-3). Hayner's mention of healing the self first is crucial. Although the apartheid regime officially began with the 1948 elections of the National Party) a year after Ramphele's birth) that would dominate until the first democratic elections in 1994, Mamphele does not once use the term apartheid in her entire memoir. Talk about "unspeakable" trauma! Ramphele mentions only on the last page of her memoir that she has begun the process of healing, first with the body:

> On my second visit to New York in 1985, she [Donna Shalala, Secretary for Health in the Clinton Administration and colleague of Ramphele's] looked at me mischievously and said: 'Mamphela, I am going to introduce you to American decadence.' She then took me to a place where she regularly had her weekly manicure and pedicure. What bliss! I have never looked back. I have learnt to enjoy paying attention to my body. This I believe is a necessary part of the *healing* process I *personally* have to undergo. That healing process has finally begun in earnest (223, my emphasis).

Another part of the solution lies in an undying belief in effective communication to continue to influence government policy makers on the crisis of achieving human rights. Nawal El Saadawi observes that the true spirit of revolution lies in an ever-constant scrutinization of governmental and social practices:

> We need to end this unjustified faith in democracy, the free market, free elections, and Western or Eastern civilization. The words *democracy* and *freedom* have become the most violent in our postmodern era as they are based on deception and the power of the global media and telecommunications industry. Deception is a violent war against the mind. I never lose hope, because hope is power, and because human progress is eternal. It is an ever-changing constant. I have hope because we are learning how to fight back, how to globalize from below, locally and across the world, through Internet and telecommunications, in face-to-face meetings and through writing. These reflections are but a drop in this new ocean (*The Essential Nawal El Saadawi Reader* xvii).

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