

# Mary Turner Lane Award

The Mary Turner Lane Award is a student paper competition established in honor of the late Mary Turner Lane, who founded the women's studies program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The competition is open to any currently enrolled female LAU student. The award, consisting of \$500 and a certificate, will go to the best research paper on women/gender studies or original piece of writing such as personal or argumentative essay, (possibly but not necessarily) completed as one of the requirements of a class taken at LAU (literature, language, social sciences, cultural studies, philosophy, education etc.). Below are the two winning papers (2013).

## Winning Graduate Research Paper

### Women's Resistance to Hostile Spaces

**Mona Kazzaz**

Civil war in Lebanon has lasted for fifteen years and has claimed a large number of victims between dead and wounded. War's victims are not only individuals involved in the battlefield to fight for a cause they believe in, but also women who usually do not participate in face to face battles. In times of war, men who are not soldiers refrain from going out owing to the military situation outside. Home is thus transformed from a place where a woman can achieve partial freedom, to a space where she is monitored by the male gaze continuously. She thus becomes a double victim: victim of an outside patriarchal society which dictates rules of behavior she should abide by, and a victim of the power her husband, father, and brother exert on her inside her home. According to Blunt and Rose (1994), space is "central both to masculinist power and to feminist resistance" (p. 1) since men impose rules that women try to resist.

The two novels discussed in this paper are *Binayat Mathilde* (1999) and *Tawahin Beirut* (1976). The main action in both takes place in Beirut. Both works describe the plight of the female from the perspective of different women: Katia, the two aunts, two women at the bakery, the narrator's mother and Mathilde in *Binayat Mathilde*. In *Tawahin Beirut*, the women examined are: Mme Rose, Zannoub, Miss Marie and Tamima. Women in the two novels are portrayed as powerless even in their most powerful moments of decision making because the social structure works against them. The power relations between men and women almost always privilege men over women. In this context, women are different from men socially, economically, and sexually, but they are also different among one another because each one of them fights essentialism in her own way and from her own place that doesn't resemble

any other. Thus the need for “plurilocality” or “the diverse spatialities of different women” as Rose calls it. This paper discusses the secondary characters’ conflict with space in general and then targets Mathilde and Tamima at a later stage as they are the protagonists of the two novels. It aims at showing how women who abide by society’s division of gendered space can survive on relatively good terms with this society. Those whose bodies diverge from the norm endure society’s hostility and marginalization.

## Body

### Binayat Mathilde: Of Other Women

Women have achieved highly respectable positions in the workplace and society owing to education. Still, when Katia, Nabiha Shibani’s daughter reaches the bookcase in her house, she doesn’t do it to get a book only. We see her move her fingers among the books as if caressing them rather than wanting to read them. Her dress lifts up to show her legs. She puts her feet on the warm carpet in search of a bodily sensation. The space becomes sexualized rather than a place of study or reading. Her sister is depicted as lying, a position that denotes laziness or sexual “readiness” for a male. On the other hand her brother, the male who seeks knowledge because he is rational and mindful of a possible future career, reads at his desk in a room that belongs to him alone. Katia moves around in the house without being anchored in any fixed place, while he has his own desk and room to stay in:

She crossed the cold living room, which was normally kept locked, paying no attention to the furniture set around its walls and in its corners. Her feet would cross the warm carpet, and when she reached her room she paid no attention to her sister reclining on her bed or to her brother reading at his desk in the next room (Daoud, 1999, p. 29).

On the other hand, Young (1990) speaks of confinement as a body trapped by its own gender. A researcher in feminist social theory, Young thinks that this gender division dictates the behavior of women but also, unwittingly, that of men. It dictates the behavior of women who “make a spectacle” of themselves by objectifying themselves with “too much rouge, a dingy bra strap showing” (Rose, 2002, p. 317). They display themselves publically to attract male attention. When the narrator’s nameless aunt discovers her husband’s unfaithfulness, she follows Nabiha Shibani’s advice:

Nabiha al-Shibani had advised her to dress up for him and fuss over him when he was at home. She acted on this advice and began, in the early afternoon, to send the children to the park, and to lock as many doors as she could. He did not look at her. (Daoud, 1999, p. 62)

What is ironic in this passage is that the aunt expects attention from her husband after making some improvements on her physical appearance that he notices but doesn’t respond to. She knows the strategy has failed. When she sees lipstick on his handkerchief, she confronts him in the bedroom, a place where women use their body to attract men. Marilyn Frye maintains that “domestic geography” (Rose, 2002, p. 315) in any patriarchal society allows women to be angry in the kitchen only, the site of their domestic work. The aunt’s brother acts in the traditional way a Middle Eastern

man does in such circumstances: with one hand he closes her mouth to stop her from speaking her mind. With the other hand he holds her husband to forbid him from hitting her, keeping in mind that she is an object he possesses:

My uncle stood between them, with one hand over his sister's mouth, and with the other, fending off her husband, who kept trying to get at her, and then backing off. (Daoud, 1999, p. 63)

It is true that the image the aunt projects is far from the stereotyped image of a docile female, but she loses her battle with her husband anyhow. When she forbids him from coming home, he finds the idea not unjust in the least, and he goes away. When he comes back after reconciliation, he doesn't wait for her to forget, which shows that he is in control: "It was too quick, the way things returned to normal between them, and it was not to my aunt's liking" (Daoud, 1999, p. 64).

Other women in the novel don't own their bodies too, so men assign them the space they are to occupy without even asking them and the women do not object. When the narrator's uncle buys a new car and wants to take the family around in it, the aunt who usually sits in the front sits in the back because a new male friend wants to join in:

My aunt would sit beside her brother in the front seat, and her children sat with my other aunt in the back. That was the arrangement until after a while he became friendly with one of our village relatives and sat him up front, while my two aunts crowded with the children into the back. (Daoud, 1999, p. 66)

Even the way some of these women move and use their bodies is artificially constructed to suit the expectations of the society they live in. They don't choose a place in open space to sit, but an enclosed and hidden place, as if public open spaces are meant for men only. These women are self-conscious of their bodies. Mulvey asserts that they act as if an "abusive masculine heterosexuality" (Parker, 2008, p. 207) is watching them from a panopticon, taking photos of them to later judge them and evaluate them in accordance with the dichotomy of whore or virgin. The narrator's other aunt 'Aliyya romantically imagines herself being photographed sitting under a tree or near a creek. Because the photograph cannot be changed once taken, 'Aliyya's posture ensures that the photo projects an image of her as a pure virgin:

Both my aunts treated their day out as if someone had instructed them how to behave. They sat in the shade of a tree or in a secluded spot near the water. My aunt Aliya imagined herself in a photograph that showed her sitting under the tree and near the water. (Daoud, 1999, p. 67)

Patriarchy and masculinity have always played a repressive role in the lives of women and the place these women should occupy. When the grandfather comes from the village to live in Beirut, he sets up rules that the aunt has to abide by. He chooses where he will sleep, and even if it is in the middle of the living room, she does not refuse. She makes special kinds of food for him and keeps the place tidy and calm. Unlike women of the same age, he still attracts females who are attracted

to a strongly built man. At the same time, these women are unable to express to him their admiration of his body because it is not socially accepted. It would mean they are transgressing the limit of their restricted space. Only men can express physical attraction and be open or even brag about it:

My grandfather was pounding the dough with both hands, the sweat glistening on his bare chest. [The two women] continued to look at him and whisper softly until my father came back to the counter. (Daoud, 1999, p. 58)

Once he decides that he needs to move back to the village, the aunt is fast to pack his things up. This reaction is understandable if one looks at the suffering she undergoes while he is around, being always there to answer to his needs. Not only that, he expects his daughter to be servile to him, because in his mind this is what real women do. Her performance of femininity is in line with social expectations. When he leaves she removes any traces of him in his room underlying her rejection of the fake role she has been obliged to play. She is so eager for him to leave and for herself to control space, but she cannot divulge this for fear of his reaction. She only changes the setting of his room when she is sure he is far away:

My aunt simply packed him a bundle of his clothes, he took it up and walked down the stairs. And when she saw, from the balcony, that he had covered a good distance in the direction of the market and the car that was waiting to take him away, she rushed to the corner where he had been sleeping, took his rolled-up mattress to another room, and pulled out of the wall the nails on which he used to hang his clothes. (Daoud, 1999, p. 56)

The narrator's mother is mild in dealing with her own suffering and resistance. The despotic aunt divides the house as she pleases, making the mother's life in the house uncomfortable: "She said she could not relax in the flat" (Daoud, 1999, p. 30). The aunt locks her two rooms leaving the children to wreak havoc on the mother's rooms. The aunt attends to the minor demands of the unmarried uncle while the mother looks after his major needs. The aunt literally puts his mother in a corner and eventually succeeds in driving her out. The sentence, "It saddened her that we were leaving the flat after all those years (Daoud, 1999, p. 93) is repeated twice to show the mother's sorrow at having to evacuate the house in which they have always felt like strangers anyway. Her son remarks that her tears are kept in her throat, farewell words come out distorted, and even her voice has a strange intonation that the son can't recognize. Her body itself is perceived by her son as shrinking to mirror the grief she feels at her new situation:

My mother's steps grew smaller the higher we climbed the steep street to the petrol station. Her short legs seemed to move nimbly, as she took more steps, but she was barely moving forward. (Daoud, 1999, p. 94)

### Of Mathilde

*Binayat Mathilde* talks about a real life character whose name is Mrs Mathilde Bahour, a landlady massacred by a man who rented a room in her apartment in the 1980's. The title of the novel plays an important role in directing the reader's perspective.

As Ken Seigneurie mentions, the title of the novel *Binayat Mathilde*, is translated into English by Peter Theroux as *The House of Mathilde* and not Mathilde's Building. The Arabic title cannot be literally translated into English because Mathilde's house "embodies both the repression and the license characteristic of society" (Seigneurie, 2011, p. 48). It represents the city's tensions in times of war and Mathilde's irresponsible act of welcoming a stranger into the house. Mathilde's home also resists change with the author repeating that it hasn't changed. This is a synecdoche of a whole building trying to stay alive in the middle of a raging ugly war. Her home is also the unifying symbol of all the women in the novel who struggle for freedom irrespective of or within the norms sanctioned by society.

On the other hand, Wikipedia states that Mathilde is derived from Old High German and means "mighty in battle". In fact, we see Mathilde throughout the story silently and metaphorically launching battle after battle against a society that refuses to acknowledge her freedom. An example of this would be her indifference to the chit-chat that takes place in the building when she refuses to go to the wedding of the narrator's uncle. Even when her best friend Mme Khayyat begs her, and with all the neighbors going to the wedding, she does what she thinks is good for her. Young (1990) is against "the ideal of community" because it "generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusions" (p. 301) to those who don't belong. This ideal doesn't allow difference and represses people who have different views. Community molds individuality into the collectivity of the whole, which Mathilde rejects. Mathilde doesn't even think that Mme Khayyat is serious in this demand:

Mathilde paid little attention when Madame Khayyat tried to convince her to go to the wedding like all the other neighbours. She would not even believe that her neighbor had seriously meant what she said. (Daoud, 1999, p. 86)

Mathilde is recalcitrant, and she is openly so. Even at the age of fifty, she does not keep her relation to her lover secret, and gossip says that she knew him even before her husband's death. She rushes to the balcony of her house where everybody can see her waving to him when he comes. His outer appearance in the novel makes the reader more aware of Mathilde's unruly behavior: "he looked childish in his velvet trousers and plimsolls" (Daoud, 1999, p. 48). This man is not only having an unconventional affair with Mathilde, but is also oblivious of the neighbors' awareness of the affair. The neighbors do not stomach her unlawful relation to the "red man", whose name comes from the color of his car. The car's red color is significant on two levels. It is the color of passion and it indirectly foreshadows Mathilde's red blood that is shed at her body's dismemberment. When his visits start to grow apart, she doesn't show any kind of emotion and goes on with her life regularly since she is aware that her relation with him is transient: "The disappearance of the red-faced man in the Gordini came as no surprise to Mathilde" (Daoud, 1999, p. 74).

Women are used to disciplining their bodies when they are under the microscope of the patriarchal gaze. According to Mulvey (1989), scopophilia or "the pleasure of looking at another person as an erotic object" is usually done by men (p. 7). It reduces women to objects of the male gaze, and this way women are disciplined but they also lose their agency. They discipline themselves even when the male gaze is missing from

their lives because they want to fit male expectations. Mathilde is a widow who lives on her own:

Mathilde, when she sat on her bed amid her coats and hats, never allowed herself to feel that she was all alone in the flat, so she did not curl her feet up beneath her on the bed. She sat with them straight out before her, and that severe look never left her face. (Daoud, 1999, p. 53)

Her house looks more like a threatening prison than a safe home. To use Gillian Rose's words, "women's sense of embodiment makes space feel like a thousand piercing eyes" (Rose, 2002, p. 317). Because of this and because she diverts from the norm, Mathilde unconsciously does to herself what otherwise society would do to her: she locks herself up. She prefers her space to be opaque because she wants people to know her femininity is not too easily defined and because transparency is the space of the male who claims to know all. When she enters the house: "Mathilde closed the doors and the wooden shutters. She also locked the glass-leafed doors between the rooms and turned on the electric lamp" (Daoud, 1999, p. 53). She cannot help wanting to act "right" even when the masculine gaze does not judge her.

Part three of the novel revolves mainly around her. Chapter one of part three opens with the same sentence repeated twice in the chapter: "Mathilde would not have listened so closely had it not been for her fear" (Daoud, 1999, p. 125). Daoud writes this sentence in the third conditional form to convey the message that Mathilde is someone who would never listen to anyone were she not obliged to by an overwhelming fear for her life. Ironically, Mathilde would never have thought that the student/tenant she welcomes to rent a room in her apartment will end up her killer. Another similar sentence in the same chapter is: "Mathilde wouldn't even have opened her door to him if it had not been for the shells" (Daoud, 1999, p. 126). The negation in these three sentences with the use of the third conditional allow Mathilde to create excuses for herself to justify this bold move. The person she hosts is of a different gender, social class, religion, and the age difference between them is remarkable. A short while before the killing, his rural and primitive nature surfaces again and Daoud (1999) writes: "His eyes narrowed, and suddenly his thin face looked like that of an old man from the South" (p. 162).

By the end of the story, Mathilde is transformed from a woman as cold as ice to another who is in such desperate need for company. The exactness of his words, his learned discourse and the softness in his voice along with the war taking place outside lead her to accept his proposal of renting a room in her house. Her world and actions are so rapidly changing that they are becoming undecipherable if not even foreign to her:

It was a long day. She had spent the two previous days doing whatever cleaning she could, in anticipation of his coming. She did not know why, nor did she know why she had overdone it- her broom and cloth reaching corners and crannies that no one ever saw. (Daoud, 1999, p. 140)

His stay changes her from an unconventional woman to a housewife who cares about the cleanliness of her house to irrational extremes. She may also be cleaning the

house to metonymically clean herself from the remains of a sexual contact they might have had together.

Mathilde indirectly expresses before her fateful death a need for spatial intimacy with the tenant. She changes her position in bed and in the kitchen many times to get spatially closer to him:

Mathilde did not realize that she was careful not to go near the door to the parlour, or that, when she slept, she lay on the southern part of the bed, leaving empty the side of the bed that was closest to his room (Daoud, 1999, p. 148).

She then sleeps in the room next door to his: “Only the little hallway and the Western-style bathroom separated the rooms where she slept” (Daoud, 1999, p. 161). And then: “The maid on the fourth floor of the next building once saw him going into her room and coming out of it while she was lying on the bed” (Daoud, 1999, p. 161). These three examples show that the repression Mathilde has submitted herself and her body to in the past no longer holds. She has an urge to lie on the bed as if she were waiting for him and she even counts the hours left for him to come home. She knows that the “unoppressive city is defined as openness to unassimilated otherness” (Young, 1990, p. 319), but she doesn’t know that such a city leads to her death.

### **Tawahin Beirut: Of Other Women**

Rose Khoury in *Tawahin Beirut* is the owner of a building/ part time brothel at Hamra. This lady has an intricate relation to places: she is at the same time placeless and anchored in place. She is placeless because she has spent the beginning of her life roaming in the East, West, South and North of the country, changing her name to suit each location. Under patriarchy, she belongs to no specific place and has no fixed name because males decide on her behalf what her location and name should be. She is called Zahra the daughter of priest Nematallah Jnadios in the North of Lebanon and Zouhour Shawish the wife of a Muslim supposedly from the South: “In the past she had moved from the east side of town to the west, from north to south and back” (Awwad, 1976, p. 8). She is Warda Nematallah on the road to Beirut. When she finally settles down alone in Hamra, without the power of patriarchy ruling her, she also settles on a definite name which is Sitt Rose or Mme Rose. She owns three taxis. Cars are known to be non places according to Lefebvre, a critic of social space. The fact that cars are always on the move makes it hard to locate Mme Rose in a fixed place. She also shows masculine rather than feminine traits. Lefebvre (2008) thinks the relationship of men to the cars they own is loaded with “daring, virility, mastery of self, energy, and even sexuality” (p. 212), which shows Mme Rose’s masculine rather than feminine traits.

On the other hand, she is anchored in place when the reader is introduced to her as a lady sitting at a table with maps one on top of the other. Maps of the new building she tries to erect define her. These maps help her fight the feeling of homelessness and placelessness she has always endured as a female moving from one place to another. They change her to a unified whole of mind and body since they position and fixate her, the female prostitute, in a male world that’s usually alien and hostile to her. Maps make her visible in that male world after being excluded from it for so long. They

allow her to have her own vision of the city. She becomes the “master subject” who has all the self-confidence she needs to direct the work of male engineers. She even curses them from that position for lying to her:

She swallowed one of her pills, cursing architects and architecture. They assured her in the beginning that the costs would not be more than 150,000 Lebanese pounds. They had now put them up to 250,000. (Awwad, 1976, p. 7)

Not only that. Mme Rose’s house is divided into a living room, five rooms, and a kitchen. Her room is at the beginning of the aisle, with a window looking down the street and another at the stairway in a panopticon form to control the building and the street together. Once her new building is constructed, she refuses to give the rooftop floor to anyone else because she wants to have a panoramic view of the neighborhood so as to control it: “The roof she intended for herself, no one else would be above her” (Awwad, 1976, p. 10).

Zannoub is another woman whose relation to space is compromised. She is a servant from Akkar at Mme Rose’s house. Her patriarchal father comes to Mme Rose to ask for the wage of Zannoub that the latter is not supposed to touch. He beats her on the staircase because she asks for a small gold bracelet. Even under such appalling situation, Zannoub doesn’t give up. Zannoub breaks the boundaries of patriarchy and fatherhood by publically showing her refusal to be ill-treated, and by reacting violently to it both verbally and physically. Using language and her body to defend her rights publically, she transgresses laws that keep her mouth shut and her body inside the house. What she does is unusual for a rural girl: “She got up, covered in blood, and leapt towards him, screaming: ‘Kill me, go on, kill me! I’d be better off dead!’” (Awwad, 1976, p. 54)

Later on, Zannoub sleeps happily in Tamima’s room, considered as shelter by Zannoub after her unfortunate encounter with her father. Sitting by the window, she watches dustmen picking up garbage. Just like her father throws her on the staircase and steps on her, the dustman throws a cardboard box full of kittens on the truck after stepping on it. He “lift[ed] his foot and crush[ed] the box with his foot before pouring more rubbish on top of it” (Awwad, 1976, p. 57). Zannoub and the kittens are treated in the same violent way by the same masculine power in the same place (the streets). Both Zannoub and the kittens will suffer the same unjust fate. She thinks that both of them belong to one place: the dumpster near the shore. She predicts her fate by thinking about the kittens: “And how would the kittens that survived manage? Was there some place on the beach rubbish tip where small kittens could hide?” (Awwad, 1976, p. 57).

We later see a seven-month pregnant Zannoub committing suicide by throwing herself off the Raouche cliff. Ironically, the shore that may be the kittens’ shelter according to her is her own deathbed:

At ten o’clock yesterday morning passers-by at Raouche saw a young woman throw herself into the sea. They rushed to rescue her, but she died on the way to hospital. (Awwad, 1976, p. 165)

Before that, she runs away from Mme Rose's house so as not to be aborted by force. In such a society, her body is not her own. She can't decide what to do with her illicit teenage pregnancy. Mme Rose, Kirsh and Jaber decide what to do with it. She is desperate for a place to stay in. Unable to root herself in any specific place first because she is a woman and second because she is a sinner, she roams Lebanon aimlessly like Mme Rose did before her:

She just got into the lift of the first building she came to on Hamra, and from there on the roof. She stayed on the roof all night. By daybreak she was on the Sidon road; not the road to Akkar. But who could she turn to in Sidon? She wandered around all day. She went into an apartment building intending to sleep under the landing. She came back from Sidon on foot. She sat down at the edge of the road. (Awwad, 1976, p. 163)

Miss Marie is another woman who has a problematic relation with her body and the space she occupies. She is a nurse in the American University Hospital. She is an intelligent and active young woman. Orphaned at a young age, she has to quit school and work to put food on the table for her widowed mother and three sisters. She becomes in no time chief of staff at the surgery section. She even has a "room of her own", and Tamima envies her for having it: "What a lovely apartment she had to live in, with a living-room, two bedrooms and a kitchen. In a very smart and clean building too. There she was free and independent (Awwad, 1976, p. 63).

The space the Christian Miss Marie lives in is quite different from that of the Muslim Tamima and Zannoub, even though Miss Marie is mistakenly killed in that same house. She is the subject of Jaber's violence for the mere fact of being a woman. She also behaves in the same controlled manner in the presence of men. This independent woman is unable to be herself in the presence of Akram Jourdi. She cannot behave as she usually does. In fact, with her close friend Tamima around, Miss Marie is playful and merry. In the hospital where he lay sick, and where his gaze cannot reach her: "Mary felt a certain buoyancy inside her; she walked on to Akram Jurdi's room as if she were dancing" (Awwad, 1976, p. 96).

Because he doesn't see her and thus can't judge her, she lets herself and her body go, walking as if she were dancing. But when he is around, we see her puzzled and wanting to do too many things at once, which makes her look and sound ridiculous because this is what men expect her to be. Man's presence pressures her to perform according to what society sees as feminine role, especially when she is in love. Because she's a woman, she is supposed to be awkward and silly when in love:

She was wondering where she could put the huge basket of red irises which had just arrived. Every day there were more bouquets which she kept on arranging. As she did she would marvel and exclaim and laugh aloud. She went back to him now and took the thermometer from his mouth. (Awwad, 1976, p. 97)

He, on the other hand, shows composure in and control of the conversation: "But Akram Jurdi had turned over that particular page: the conversation seemed to irritate him. He asked her to talk to him about herself" (Awwad, 1976, p. 97).

Even after having proposed to her, she talks about Akram only after adding the title of Mr to his name as if he were her boss. She doesn't voice her opinion about Tamima's relation with Hani without referring to Akram as back up or validation to her own:

Monsieur Akram was here. He is a Moslem and an advocate and all he wants is your own good. If there is nothing for it but to get married- and this is Monsieur Akram's view- then the only solution is for you and Hani to run away to America, after he has his degree , on some moonless night! Monsieur Akram says these obstacles will disappear in future. (Awwad, 1976, p. 161)

### Of Tamima

The novel *Tawahin Beirut* is translated into English as *Death in Beirut*. *Tawahin* in English means mills and mills are known to crush and grind, causing death. Unfortunately, the only characters who will be squeezed in the novel and who will lead to their death in Beirut are females because the traditional society they live in controls their behavior. The men, on the other hand, criminals and malicious as they are, go scot-free because of the same traditional society's double standards. The verb to mill also means to condition with a rotary cutter. But doesn't Q amui's knife on Tamima's face in part two of the novel shape her destiny?

As for her name, Tamima comes from the Arabic verb 'tamma', meaning completed and perfected. In the context of the story, Tamima is a young Shiite Muslim girl from the South of Lebanon who seeks education and the freedom of urban life in Beirut. Rebellious as she is, she is convinced that her life is never complete without these two elements. Education empowers her and relieves her from Jaber, her controlling brother:

From now on it [this path] would eat away no more of her life than the time separating her from the school-leaving examination, the Baccalaureate. ... The only thing she knew, and others were going to know, was that her life was her own. ... She would live just as she wanted to. (Awwad, 1976, p. 2)

But this may only be a dream that is not meant to be realized. Jaber plans to force her to marry the wealthy Jamil Muwali. After refusing this business deal called marriage, Jaber disciplines her by hitting her. She is unable to control her life and she hits rock bottom. She runs to the only place that reflects the devastation she feels, the valley: "She turned her back and walked down to the valley" (Awwad, 1976, p. 33) where she joins the *fedayeen*.

Writing in her diary, she seeks to defy ideologies that keep her place in society static and fixed. She wants to carve a place for her in life and not in society: "I want my place in life rather than my place in society" (Awwad, 1976, p. 79). To do that, she needs to leave the house she calls a "coop" and her rural Mahdiya. These two places represent for her the spaces of repression she most hates. For her, Hamra is the place to be in, but Hamra is a location that is not going to be easily accessible to her. When Mme Rose first sees her, she offers her a job and Jaber's room in his absence only after noticing that her body can make heads turn. This means that

Tamima can have Jaber's room on one condition, she needs to prostitute herself. Hamra also is connected to women with slit throats. Not only does Jaber call her a bitch because she visits Hamra, he threatens to kill her. Beirut in general and Hamra in particular are not appropriate places for her but very adequate ones for him: "He threatened to kill her if she ever again set foot on Hamra or made even a move in the direction of Beirut. Then he went back to where he had come from" (Awwad, 1976, p. 18). When Tamima sits at one sidewalk café, she opts for what Lefebvre calls the "representational space," (The Production of Space 79) the directly lived experience of the inhabitants of a certain space. This view turns Hamra into a place Tamima directly participates in making by projecting on it her own perception and dreams: "She went for a stroll, then she came back to sit in a pavement café. Hamra had dazzled her with its bursting life and colour" (Awwad, 1976, p. 5).

For Tamima "the desire to see the city [precedes] the means of satisfying it," (De Certeau, 92) and she seems to be ready to sacrifice everything for this desire. Hamra's phantasmagoria and its ever changing scenery attract her. After trying to commit suicide, she dreams she is surrounded by many ladies looking like Mme Rose and by rats that symbolize decay. Tamima doesn't know where she is exactly: "Was this the Hamra area, or Bab Idriss, or Raouche?" (Awwad, 1976, p. 105). She tries hard to discern where she is but fails to open her eyes. She can only see the alluring Mme Rose clearly. Blinded by what she expects Beirut to be, this metaphorical blindness prevents her from seeing that this city is really not the place for her. She can never survive in it. Tamima later hallucinates that rats, connected to disease, filth and hidden truths, roam around Beirut. This signifies that the totality of the city is a threatening secretive place she can never decode.

In the darkened café called "Tea and Phone", she looks at strangers' behavior to learn more about life in the city. The anonymity of city life attracts her because she mistakenly thinks that she can blend in and do the same without being identified. She believes space in Beirut is partitioned: "The booths were separated by partitions, each was a world of its own" (Awwad, 1976, p. 98). This gives her more freedom to act the way she pleases. According to Lefebvre (2008), the café presents a place where "what is said may be superficial, [but] the freedom to say it is fiercely defended" (p. 41). In the café she can forget about Qammoo'i whose name means repression in Arabic and who exerts a shady and threatening presence in her life:

She was in the dark café again, in her corner. Looking at the customers, scattered couples, whispering to each other, laughing, embracing publicly. But nobody looked, nobody listened. The booths were separated by partitions, each was a world of its own. Love nests. (Awwad, 1976, p. 98)

Tamima knows that the primitive forces in rural Mahdiya do not belong to Mahdiya only but to all of Lebanon. Her body is inscribed by these forces. She criticizes these by criticizing the society that allows masculinity to be the guardian of her own virginity. She rejects the double standard of society that uses honor as a tool of oppression against women, instead of asking men to honor women by allowing them education and financial support. According to her, the relationship she has with Ramzi Raad is her reaction to the hypocrisy of society since a woman's virtue should not be

measured by her virginity. Her body becomes a bone of contention between old rural traditions that refuse to die and a fast changing city that cannot keep up with the change:

She contemplated her rounded buttocks and her rounded, gleaming thighs and that small dense bush of hair. There lay her honour, like a beast of prey. There slept her virtue in the den of lions (Awwad, 1976, p. 101).

Even Hani Ra'i's liberating discourse about changing Lebanon to a better place by calling for interreligious marriage and social reform is nothing but an empty display of ideas. He does give Tamima the public space she longs for by allowing her to summarize answers of a certain inquiry about the revolution and to present them at a meeting. But he also gives her a slap on the face when she exposes to him her virginity loss. His house in Deir Limtell is also telling. Many hurdles stand between her and this house: her sexual freedom, her different religion, the class differences between Hani and herself. She looks and touches the gun that dates back to the nineteenth century. It is as old as the customs of the Ra'i family. These customs stand between the two lovers at the end of the story in the form of places Tamima is categorically banned from entering. She needs to negotiate her differences with Hani and in the coming example, the wish expresses a hypothesis that never becomes real:

Tamima stroked the rifle with the palm of her hand and touched the walls fondly. She wished she could make a tour of the house, go into the kitchen, see his room, his bed and the wardrobe where he hung his clothes (Awwad, 1976, p. 93).

A final thought on her relation to Hani. She only wishes to enter his bedroom in Deir Limtell. But when he visits her at Miss Marie's, he does enter her bedroom knowing that she is not around as if her space is open while his remains closed. Not only that. He expresses his admiration of Picasso's paintings she hangs over her desk. According to Lefebvre (2008):

Picasso's cruelty toward the body, particularly the female body, which he tortures in a thousand ways and caricatures without mercy, is dictated by the dominant form of space, by the eye and by the phallus - in short, by violence. (p. 302)

The violence of Picasso's paintings towards the female body will be mirrored in the fate of both ladies. Tamima, supposedly hating society's violence towards her, ironically joins at the end a violent group called *fedayeen*. Miss Marie is also mistankently killed instead of Tamima who lives at Mary's house.

Tamima joins the *fedayeen* at the end of the novel and relinquishes all love relationships. She says this in a diary that she sends to Hani. She does not specify the place from which she writes in the present because this present is as hazy as the future she chooses to build for herself with the *fedayeen*. She has gambled with all things available to her in the past and she has no power to stop this now. She knows that, having broken all laws and transgressed all norms, her place in society is so compromised that she has no choice but to go even further in this transgression. The only place available to her is where she breaks laws and criticizes principles: "You

remember we spoke in the meeting yesterday about acts of violence, contrary to established and acknowledged laws and codes. That is where I belong” (Awwad, 1976, p. 184). She enlists with the fedayeen when she realizes that the space accessible to her as a normal but free woman is shrinking. This is a step that looks like a double-edged sword: she gains self-confidence because the fedayeen will give her tasks to perform. Still, she is under the control of men because the *fedayeen* are a patriarchal group themselves. She jumps from the frying pan to the fire.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell, women who are under societal and cultural pressure usually rebel. They may live in the city like Mathilde or migrate to it in search of freedom or selfhood. These women seek affinity with the space they live in. Fearing war and living alone, Mathilde thinks she is unable to contain the distant rooms in her own house so she invites a male stranger to keep her company. Tamima feels affinity with Hani’s house, its wooden ceiling and adorned windows because it is where she thinks they can bridge their differences. But sometimes forces of space conspire against women because, as Lefebvre puts it space is not innocent. As said previously, their “plurilocality” makes them respond differently to their plight: space contributes to Mathilde’s death, to the confinement of the narrator’s mother in *Binayat Mathilde* and to Tamima’s tragedy.

*Binayat Mathilde* and *Tawahin Beirut* show women whose dreams have become nightmares. The social space in which they live binds them to certain fixed categories from which there is little chance to escape. Those who try to escape usually meet their death. Miller, an American playwright and essayist asks one to: “Imagine, just imagine, that there is nothing ahead of you but your destiny,” (Awwad, 1976, p. 163) and Awwad uses this sentence in the fourth part of his novel to describe these women’s lives. Both authors speak of a destiny that is impossible to escape. The women studied above are bold and courageous. Their behavior is the result of long centuries of unhappiness with a space that denies them their humanity and that feeds off their submission. Even if these women fail in radically changing the world they live in, this space will never be the same after all is said and done. All these women want is to be able to “gesture and stride, stretch and push to the limits ... [their] physical capabilities” (Rose, 2002, p. 316).

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