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On the Female Search for Identity : A Feminist Reading of *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture

Submitted by: **Supervised by:**
MOUAISSIA Manel   **Ms. MOUMENE Soumia**

BOARD OF EXAMINERS

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work for all those women who fought for women's liberty;

For all those women who dropped patriarchy;

For all those women who defied submission;

For all those women who fought to educate themselves;

For those women who were and still are refusing to live beneath men's shadow.

In the memorial of all those women buried alive.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the female search for identity in *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French and how the patriarchal practices which characterized the American society during the 1960s and the 1970s have affected the women's search for identity and their self-awareness development. Hence, this study aims at investigating the refraction and the fission of the identity of the central heroine, Mira Ward, throughout her journey of giving up her role as a submissive and indecisive woman to adopt equal autonomy amid the plethora of experiences she undergoes in her life. It also traces the issue of identity quest and meaning in life to women and explores movingly the painful psychical and physical effects of male dominated system on women switching between the central protagonist's childhood to womanhood. Indeed, Mira, throughout the novel oscillates between four different worlds mapped out in the four different stages of life making up the whole novel, *The Women's Room*, this includes her childhood, her life as a married woman, divorced woman and the last as free and autonomous woman which do not only reflect the fraction within the self of the protagonist but also the fragmentation and the chaos of the world where she lives and everything surround her.

Through the use of a feminist approach, this paper seeks to analyze how marriage contributes in making women submissive to men's realm, and how divorce with its dreadful effects on women after a long life of dependence on man, comes as a new form of relief to liberate women from the suffering they tasted in their past marital experiences. On the one hand, the study seeks to address the impediments that resulted on the identity formation of the central protagonist including, the family restrictions and the social cost of being a woman, a lover, a mother, a divorced woman as well as a political activist in a world which sees woman as an inferior creature. But on the other hand, it elucidates clearly the fragmentation within the female identity by highlighting

not only the factors and aspects of the inequitable social rules in her life but also by relating it to the historical events and divisions in the structure of the American society during the 19th century and which reflects the personal experience of the writer herself.

Furthermore, this research attempts to throw light on the crucial role of womanism which plays a significant role on the awakening of the female awareness enabling her to free herself from the unfair practices imposed on her and realize self-reliance. The general conclusion which is the essence of this analysis is that French uses her personal experience reflected in her work, *The Women's Room*, to raise awareness and help those oppressed women beneath male supremacy and call for constitutional and political reforms to give women their equality in the American community in the context of liberal feminism.

Key Words: Patriarchy, identity, feminism, autonomy, childhood, marriage, divorce, society, self raising-awareness, dependence, independence.

Table of Contents

Arabic/ French Abstracts

Introduction

The United States of America witnessed thorough reconstructions and social upheaval which procreated a large debate about women's status in the American society after the American Civil War. Right from the end of the 19th century, women in US went through hard and rough experiences asking for their position in society and vociferating for equality between men and women in all spheres of life. The woman's issue kept buried, tongueless and enshrouded for millennia till the 1860s. From the American Civil War onwards, women in America saw the need to settle a law that would promote the feminist cause and respond to the new emerging feminist needs and dismantle all forms of discrimination and oppression that pillaged women's freedom.Thus, the nineteenth century has led to the rise of women's efforts to fight for their rights and oppose male domination rules.

Before the 1890's many women's campaigns and organizations were proliferated across the U.S to uphold the demands calling for women's rights. Meanwhile, many American women were opposing the notion of the ideal position of the woman as a wife and as an inferior and submissive creature concerned solely with children and house chores. These factors promoted the procreation of a new way of thinking about the role of woman as a free citizen in the United States. In fact, woman's protest and manifestation for her rights was a challenge to the society's conventions and political and national laws and legislations. At that time, the concept of "feminism" emerged to signify the liberated woman movement towards obtaining equal educational, professional, social status, and later to attain her legal right for suffrage.

As the American society witnessed profound changes and reforms on the social, political, national, and industrial level throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, literature has evolved as well and the position of women in American literature faced a dramatic

shift which reflected the bitter reality of women's life in the American society at that era. Nonetheless, it was the suffragette movement that has launched this revolution of gender equality between women and men in the literary context. Thus, as women gained their right for education, women's literature gained widespread prominence by the end of the 19th century and the literature of that period led to the fructification of "3,000 new words introduced into American language with new slang and dialects represented in realistic writing and painting a picture of America at the turn of the century and early 20th century" ("Women's Contribution to Early American Literature"). As a result of the abuse and the exploitation that women suffered in a "man dominated society", many women took the liability and raised their voice against all forms of abussive rules to break the silence and realize liberation to all exploited and submissive women.

Nevertheless of the patriarchal literary oppression which was still binding women's capacities within the literary boundaries, female writers fought for acceptance and spoke out against social expectations of women to break the silence imposed on them for a long time and gave new picture for women's potentials. Such brave emancipation was a mean to defend many women's rights and stop all kinds of oppression and deprivation of the patriarchal society against women. Consequently, the perception of 'the woman' has changed throughout all the feminist writers' works by giving the woman a new independent image and by opposing all the traditional stereotypes. Consequently, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, women's literature reflected the feminist movement through themes of identity, silence, voice, violence, abuse...etc, presenting readers with realistic views of women's intelligence, aspirations, and autonomy spanning far beyond the limitations of submissive domestic life of marriage.

Concerns such as identity quest and awareness-process were frequently voiced in feminist works as powerful tools in developing feminist awareness in America. Accordingly, the 1970s saw the appearance of a great number of literary works which particularly focused on women's cause and support the rebuff of patriarchal system expectations and urge women for independence. Marilyn French, as a notable example of many other American feminist writers who raised their voice during the feminist movement, published her bestselling novel, *The Women's Room,* in 1977 with a cover announcing that "this book will change lives" in which Marilyn French highlights the personal experiences of the protagonist through her personal development towards independent female identity.

This research deals with the analysis of the process of the development of the female character, Mira Ward, in Marilyn French's work, *The Women's Room*, during her journey questing for her identity. Besides, the aim of this dissertation is not only to focus on the topic of identity from the protagonist's experience, but also sheds the light on all the other female characters to show the dreadful impact of gender role inequality on the dismantlement of the female identity. Therefore, the present work assiduously focuses on the theme of the female identity search in which it provides a multidimensional analysis on the formation of the female selfhood in Marilyn French's notable novel, *The Women's Room,* as well as scrutinizes the role of marriage and divorce in relation to women's raising awareness.

This study also gives a close insight to the different identities that form together the constructed self of the protagonist, Mira Ward. Indeed, Mira, throughout the novel oscillates between four different worlds mapped out in the four different stages of her life making up the whole novel, *The Women's Room*; this includes her childhood, her adolescence, her life as a married woman, and a divorced woman. These different

phases she goes through with the different obstacles she confronts in her life due to the patriarchal world system do not only reflect the fraction within the self of the protagonist but also the fragmentation and the chaos of the world where she lives and everything surround her.

The quest of identity in the feminist theory plays a major role in portraying women's self- discovery and their progress of identity awareness under male domination. All the forms of oppression that are enacted on women by men are approved under the name of morality, values, norms, customs, tradition and culture. These patriarchal standards left the women with no identity, or without any self-recognition of who really is she? How should she act in the society? And, what or where she ought to be? From the above discussion essential and complementary questions deserve to be raised: Is Mira aware of the unfair social expectations that form the woman's identity in her childhood? How could Mira construct her identity while being confined to her society's commands? Why does Mira accept marriage and subordination? How could both her experience in marriage and in divorce affect her identity awareness?

This work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is devoted to explore the social, cultural and historical events that marked the period in which Marilyn French's novel, *The Women's Room,* was written in and to illustrate the movements by which her work was influenced. Also, specific attention will be provided to the concept and theory 'feminism' in its broad content. The first chapter is divided into three sections. The first section introduces an overview history of women's rights in USA which does not only clarify the reasons behind the way females were subjugated and alienated from the American society, but also it helps to understand the contextual background of the novel itself. The second section examines how females are

represented in American literature. Whereas, the third section discusses the emergence of feminism and its development, it also deals with the attempts of many American female writers to quest their identity as independent individuals in the American society and their goals in life as an attempt to jettison the patriarchal restrictions.

The second chapter, which is the rudiment of this study, will deal mainly with the theme of female identity crisis and the negative influence of the oppressive gender role system on women's quest for identity. This chapter is bifurcated into three sections. The first section introduces the author's biography as well as a synopsis to the narrative that introduces generally the main themes of the novel through providing the most significant events of the story. The second section discusses the theme of the quest of identity in Mira's childhood. Whereas the third section will focus on the patriarchal system's forms and its impact on the protagonist's identity formation which will cover the theme of female identity in relation to the theme of oppression and brutality that presents the core cause of dismantling the female characters' identity and their feeling of subordination and sorrow in life.

Since the protagonist travels between different stages throughout her life which affect deeply her self-construction, the third chapter will deal predominantly with the issue of marriage not only in the heroine's marital life, but this chapter will cover the issue of marriage in all female characters' life and the effect of this dreadful matter on the women's mental and psychological state. In the last section of this thesis, emphasis will be directed to the theme of identity quest in relation to divorce. The section starts first with analyzing the trauma of divorce as a form of oppression which affects the female identity. Second, the section will dissect the outcomes of divorce as an attempt to construct the protagonist troubled identity. Another focus will be drawn on womanism and the role of relations between women to heal the scars caused by men.

Finally, the section will discuss the significance of the central protagonist's madness providing different interpretations.

Chapter One: An Overview of American Feminist Literature

With time, memories may vanish, stories may be forgotten; therefore, to depict people's everydaylife, writers took their pens to show the true reflection of the reality of the past and the present through literature. This type of art has been always used to demonstrate the different aspects of life which are presented in the writings of many authors and which have the power to awaken, inspire, horrify or teach readers about what other people lived, suffered, changed and achieved through the long history. By presenting real and fictional characters, symbols, and by giving deep insights into the social issues of people, writers could reflect the history of people, the culture of nations of different origins, and the ideologies of many figures which characterize each era and each society.

This chapter provides a theoretical foundation of the general context of the novel and introduces the feminist theory which is used in the analysis of the novel which is going to be discussed in detatils in the next two chapters. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents a general overview of women's rights in the US community throughout the American history. It portrays how females were subjugated and alienated from a society ruled by men and how they fought to gain the rights the American women are enjoying nowadays in America which will help also in understanding the context of the novel.

The second section discusses the rise of feminism in the United States by providing the history feminism and its development. It also deals with the general definition of 'feminism' in addition to the different waves that charactirized the feminist movement in America and how does this idea of feminist rights movement grow through time in order to highlight the most significant reforms women witnessed

throughout the American fiminist history. This section in turn helps in discussing the feminist features present in the novel.

Whereas the third section deals mainly with the evolution of feminist literature. It identifies the theme of the quest of identity in the American canon by distinguishing bewtween the representation of the theme of female identity in the feminist works written by women and by men. Furthermore, it deals with the appearance of the female bildungsroman which charactirizes mose of feminist writers as they tackle the theme of feminist identity throughout the female characters' growth and thus presents a new way of representing the theme of identity quest in American literature.

I.1. A Survey of Women's Rights in USA

In the United States of America, the 19th century was an era of reform, a world of profound progress, discovery, innovation, and industrialization which led to the question of women's rights in the American society and thus women had a new representation in USA starting from that epoch. During this century, women's position in the American society shifted greatly from the pre-Revolutionary War era to the early twentieth century. Moreover, the American community heard controversies about a wife's right to own property, staged arguments about mother's right to custody of her children and ownership of her body, and saw the birth of the movement for women's suffrage (Lerner 236-7).

This was also the era of the professional woman writer, a time in which women demanded a place alongside men in the world of literary works, to make their opinions heard, and to tell their own stories which reflect their personal experience. During that eon, feminist literature presented an effective tool to promote social change and to take control of women's life, to make their voices heard outside the domestic confines of the home, and to alter their positions within the social order ("Women's Contribution to

Early American Literature"). Charles E. Bressler points out that woman's progress in her work or in literature reflects her struggle through history as an opposition to the male domination in which literature plays a major role in defining woman's position in the society, he argues:

> No one is so well calculated to think for woman kind as woman herself. In the province of administering to the wants of her sex, no one can be so well adapted as she. Her advancement is in no better way proven than by her progress in medicine and literature, to say nothing of the reform movements which she is steadily carrying on for the benefit of her sex. (167)

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, before 1920, women in the United States did not enjoy any of the same social, political or economical opportunities as men, until the third decade of the 20th century (Khan 357). Before 1930s, married women were not allowed to travel, to use their own passports, to work or even to manage the properties which they acquired before marriage and which were dominated by men on the behalf of their wives (Arnesen 1359). Generally, because of the male dominated organization of the society, women were deprived from workplaces, they were not allowed to vote or to own property. Instead, they were limited to house boundaries only; in other words, American women were completely rejected from the American society and they were subjected to the laws and regulations imposed on them by men. In this regard, Eric Arnesen, in his book, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History,* describes marriage bars for teachers in America this way: "Prejudice against married women as teachers derived from two deeply rooted ideas in American society: first, that women's labor belongs to their husbands, and second, that

public employment is akin to charity. School authorities doubted that women could service their families and the schools without slighting the latter" (1359).

When American soldiers returned from the war, women were obliged to leave workplaces for their husbands, fathers and brothers; women had to comeback to their traditional life as housewives and children keepers. However, the American Revolution coupled with the realities of wartime experience started to bring women to new prospects. Thus, the roles of women began to change. Women chose to participate in all the political, economical, social, professional domains and break all the longstanding beliefs and laws which were imposed by men. They resisted the patriachal stereotypes and preferred to fulfill their autonomy, to earn their own money which was the first step towards their independence. As a result, "[t]he war.., dissolved some of the distinctions between masculine and feminine traits" (Moran 241).

Meanwhile, women's role as housewives and children keepers started to change dramatically. After the war, women came to the conclusion that they had to be more effective economically, politically and professionally than just taking care of their children and their husbands. In the 1876s, a "Women's Declaration of Independence" was read at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Banner 39). Stanton, a women's right activist and social reformer who sought for social justice for women in America, and other women working on the document declared that women lacked the right to own property, frequently earned less money than men and that they had been limited from educational opportunities. The "Declaration" called for gender equality for both, men and women and, "in a lengthy series of resolutions, Cady Stanton and the others called for an end to all discrimination based on sex" (Wilson F and Defeis 168). In 1848, 300 American suffragettes led by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton met in the first Women Right's Convention in which they declared "it is

the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise" (Kuersten 203). Despite strong opposition, women grew in power and won a number of new rights during the 1800s and 1900s.

Later, feminist leaders such as Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone among others were organizing campaigns to end what is left of slavery and in 1833 Lucretia Mott was elected the first female anti slavery society in Philadelphia (Adams 7). The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) were both created in an attempt to promote the right of suffrage for women. Finally, women made their biggest step in being accepted as equal members of society by adopting the right to vote in the 1920 after the ratification of the 19th Amendment (Lerner 247). This fulfillment changed women's position totally. Also, they joined to prominent organization like the NOW (National Organization for Women) which was created to call for women's right internationally.

Later, the enactment of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 guaranteed women's right at workplace as well as for their wages in which it eliminated all kinds of discrimination against women in jobs, pay, and promotion (Brown 527-40). All those changes presented the beginning of women's independence, their ideology focused on the idea that women have to love themselves from inside and outside. As a result, women took a step forward by changing their looks, with new hair-cut, dresses, they started drinking alcohol, smoking and dancing which altered negatively their behaviors in society and their attitudes towards the the public view as a whole. Ultimately, it was not until the enactment of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 that discrimination against women in workplaes, payment, and promotion was made illegal for women of different races and origines (Brown 527-9). Indeed, all of the legal rules which differenciated the right of men and women had been eliminated in all spheres of life.

1.2. The Representation of Women in American Literature

Literature is not simply a reflection of society; it is in actuality much more. Literature draws upon society and transmits its special images, qualities, history and issues. It possesses the power to either nourish or discourage societal ideas and ideologies in people's minds and perceptions. Hence, facts, stereotypical views and beliefs of both men and women of different origins and races in society are enriched and reinforced by literary works (Fernandes et al. 88). Almost everybody agrees about the point that American literature is very vast and rich of diversified genres, in which authors try to tackle and report the real issues of the melting pot of identity in America within people's life where everyone struggled through time to prove their identity, citizenship, and equality among other races or genders either within or without the control of other individuals or groups of people during a significant period of time. Female narrative is among these various genres.

Many critics define feminist literature as that specific approach of literature which encompasses the all types of fictional and non fictional works, poetry, essays and all literary works such as the essays and books written in the mid 1960's and 1970's that relate to women's case and equality issues in all arenas, including social, proffessional, political, and domestic (Pratt 872). It is true that feminist literature targets a wide range of written expression, but what they all have in common is a deep study on the female experience and how it transforms, develops, and evolves. This genre of literature is a collection of books and works that were and still widely adopted as influential forms in shaping the American culture especially during the first, second and third feminist waves (Pratt 872). This approach was remarked by Elaine Showalter's works who questions the women's representation in the literary canon processes in women's writing. In the "International Journal on English Language and Literature," Maryam

Barzegari Baghbidi, in her article, states that Elaine Showalter's argues that "women writers seek for a language of their own, a style, a voice, and a structure with which they could promote a discipline previously dominated by men". She adds: "Showalter suggests that for "expressing themselves" women should attempt to "enact and express in their own lives and words the revisionary sense of transformation"" (88-90).

Writers' efforts are evident throughout the feminist waves, and often serve to justify women's rebellion against traditional gender roles for women in particular (Gouma-Peterson and Mathews 326-57). More specifically, women seem to be the target of American literature as a response to the negative depictions drawn for them in the American society during the 18th, 19th and 20th century. However, it should be mentioned that feminist literature is not only a question of gender in literature; rather, it is primiraly considered as a notable kind of political discourse in which the women's efforts are committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. Mary Wollstonecraft comments on the idea and explains "feminism is a cultural as well as a political movement" (189). Therefore, feminism is regarded as a scope which questions the prejudice between the two genders.

In this regard, feminist literature can be identified as one of the most significant genres of the American literature. Generally, most social and historical works that are identified as part of the American feminist literary publications tend to portray female characters in a way that emphasizes on women's inferiority and how they were presented as only objects from a male prespective (Talbot 146). Therefore, during the feminist movement, feminist writers took the liability to support and stand by their peers. The writings of feminist activists, in American, UK, and the world wide, depict all women's plight as inferior creatures who felt the continuous need to be heard. Hence, feminist writers were presented in each feminist era, to react over discrimination

imposed by social doctrines. During that period, the portrayal of women in feminist literature was mostly influenced by the author's personal experience or a frequent societal stereotype of women and their position in society.

As a response to the political, economical and social stereotypes, American literature was a means to answer questions raised by many women as well as theorists. Women were asking; why are women excluded from the profesional and economical spheres of the society? Why is man the dominant and not the woman? Is the woman obliged to follow man's commands and be his own property? Why? Is the woman obliged to obey another creature who is divinely equal to her? Why does man have a superior position in the society rather than the woman? Do women have the right of their own property? Do women have the ability to rebel and impose their role in the society? How can a woman be satisfied of her personality far from man's judgements? As a result of these questions and many other questions, feminist writers came out to provide facts and unveil the hidden claims that deprived women from their rights for a very long time.

The depiction of females in American literature gives an insight into many women's experiences in the country who were living similar life conditions, under men's opression (Friedan 21). The American feminist literature presents multidimentional views of women, due to the renaissance of female authors at that time. American feminist writers like Marilyn French, kate millett, Gloria Jean Watkins, Betty Friedan, Gloria Marie Steinem, Audre Lorde, Sylvia Plath, Gertrude Stein, Louisa May Alcott who generally present images of women in a male-centered viewpoint, creating a modern representation of women in literature from inferior and subjected individuals to effective personalities in the American society. In "Feminist Literary Criticism: From Anti-Patriarchy to Decadence", Anne Barbeau Gardiner states that the American literary

canon is "strikingly narrow…prepared by white men whose judgment was prejudiced and whose language was full of gendered meanings" (395).

Despite the narrowness of the early feminist literary movement, female writers were politically and socially motivated and committed to critical, oppositional renaissance. This new form of literature encouraged that notable group of the society, women, to rebell againts all forms of patriarchy which deprived them from their life, first as humans and second as American citizens. Many female writers and feminists argued that what they needed was recognition of what women need to fulfil: their potential and their own natures and not only equality. Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One's Own*, states her argument about how women's talents have been wasted. Walters supports Woolf's argument and comments on it:

> She contemplates a number of greatly talented women from the past, from
>
> the Duchess of Newcastle to George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë – who
>
> were deprived of experience, intercourse and travel and that is the reason
>
> they never wrote quite as powerfully and generously as they might have.
>
> Woolf also reasoned that a woman needs money and a room of her own to
>
> be able to write. (96)

In this regard, the liberal feminist, Betty Friedan who was a key player in second-wave feminism, published her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, in which she opposed the idea that women could find true identity only through childbearing and homebound. She states "They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights" (15-6). In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan captures the frustration and the anguish women were trapped in beyond the domestic life and marriage norms. As a four children's

mother who left college to get married at the age of ninteenth, like many other American houswives, proclaimed: "I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm a server of food and a putter-on of pants and a bedmaker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I?" (21). These women did not hate marriage; they could not accept that doing house chores all day is what they must do. These women could not accept that their role in life as synonymous to serving others. Moreover, the unfair inequality between them and their husbands pushed Friedan like many other feminist writers to use literature as a way to break the silence for those women in the American societies during the 1990s and participate in the feminist movement to realize liberation, equality and freedom for millions of opressed women in America (Walters 96).

In her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan clearly opposes the idea that women are the victims of the social false belief and that women could realize their fulfillments only through childbearing and houseworking. Friedan assures that women can never find their identity through the life with their husbands and children in which they feel they are trapped in it. In fact, these social traditions and beliefs lead women to lose their identities and limit them from performing their rights. Friedan's evidences and explanations of female rights changed the way American women thought in the aftermath of the 19th century. Moreover, Friedan's book was an appeal to women's prospects outside their houses, and presented enlightenment to those who had always faced difficulty to understand the source of their feelings of isolation and inferiority which Betty names "The problem that has no name". Friedan used that expression as a result of the patriach's practices on women and to describe how women were discontent and affraid to admit the ugly truth that they were unhappy with their life, a life which

has been designed by patriachal stereotypes and social norms that pushed women to occupy unconfortable and unpleasant roles and serve men's needs and desires only.

As far as the field of literature is concerned, Elaine Showalter, one of the founders of feminist literary criticism in United States academia, believes that feminist literature does not portray only women and men's images in literature, but it also depicts and analyzes the relation that links them and the way society shapes them, with the reinterpretations they offer, which are found in the content of the literary work (Talbot 146). Broadly speaking, Showalter insists that feminist literature involves a critical analysis of the shallow vision of the world to women and men and depicts the social claims of the reality of man control on the female body or her psychological state as well as other issues like rape, marriage and seduction. Basically, according to Elaine Showalter, there are two mainstreams in feminist literary theory. The first mainstream is "Phallocentrism" in which it describes how women and women's place in the society are presented in literature by male writers. Whereas the second "Gynocriticism" focuses on how female writers use their language to describe women and their status in society as well (Malik 58; Showalter 120).

One of the greatest writers, F. Scott Fitzgerald, in his novel, *The Great Gatsby,* perfectly portrays females from men's point of view as a reflection of the new women era. The novel was written and is set after World War I, which ended in November 1918, in which it was a period of profound social change in America, especially in the area of women's rights (Prislin 86-7). Despite the women's efforts toward liberation, *The Great Gatsby* accentuates the shortcomings women had. The author views that despite all women's social reforms, women were still powerless. Many critics assume that F. Scott Fitzgerald reflects his personal experience with his wife; he also describes his wife's problems through his heroine's problems (Prislin 86-7). Fitzgerald's focus on

female characters like Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson, presents a deep vision of different versions of the New Woman in America. However, the author doesn't show women in a completely positive image. In fact, the author presents his characters as flappers, foolish, careless, unfaithful, materialistic, arrogant, unemotional, and often irresponsible and greedy objects (Prislin 86-7). For example, Daizy represents the new woman of the 1920's, who is characterized as careless female. Daisy abandons Gatsby and chooses Tom, a rich man who can fulfill her needs financially. In the novel, Daisy also represents Flapper values of carelessness and detachment, this is shown in her treatment of her little daughter, when Nick asks her about her daughter, she says "I suppose she talks, and–eats, and everything" (Fitzgerald 17). She shows her disappointment of having a girl child instead of a boy child; she also explains how she wept and says, "… I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (Fitzgerald 17). To Daizy, this is the best option for any girl in life. Daizy's claim presents a general view of women's plight in a patriachal world which deprived women from enjoying their rights.

Before the 1920s, it was concieved that women's solely role in life was bouned between houseworking, children and husbands, but in the light of Fitzgerald's novel, it is shown clearly those women went broader than house limits. The author presents how women shift their attention to themselves and their position in the community and how they became careless, foolish and unfaithful towards their families. Daisy's foolishness and unfaithfulness is respresented through her betrayal to Tom. Another representation of Daizy's foolishness is when she decides to drive the car owerwhelmed with anger, and ends up hitting Myrtle with her car killing her. And as a result of Myrtle's death, Gatsby gets killed for Daisy's foolish behavior (Fitgerald 317). Marriage is another significant problem disscussed by Fitzgerald's novel and reflects one of the major social

problems within women's life in the America society. Daisy's betrayal to Tom explains her dissatisfaction with her marriage. Men's aggressiveness is also revealed in Tom's rudeness with Daisy when he bruises Daisy's knuckle and Myrtle as well. Tom's display of physical power over Daisy and Myrtle reveals women's powerlessness according to Fitzgerald's view. Also, it is mentioned before that Myrtle was locked in her room by Wilson; this is another evidence that men back then had control and power over their wives which clearly describes the brutality and opression of men over women.

Feminist writers play a fundamental role in literature from the early 19th century till the present; they give us an opportunity to look at women in literature from women's point of view (Pratt 872). In this regard, John Stuart Mill explains: "We may safely asset that the knowledge that men can acquire of women even as they have been and are without reference to what they might be is wretchedly imperfect and superficial and will always be so until women themselves have told all they have to tell" (3). Mill clearly explains how feminist writers refuse to accept the images of women as portrayed by male writers, in which men portray women as they find them not as women would have perceived themselves, they view that women characters portrayed by men in literature are lacking in authenticity. This new form of portrayal of women paved the way for a new path of self liberation, this new genre of literature enabled women to reflect women in their real representation and image unlike how they were represented by male writers before the feminist movement (Malik 58).

I.3. Theoretical Framework

I.3.1. Feminism: Its Emergence and Development

The etymology of 'feminism' is extracted from the Latin word, "femina" which means woman, formerly understood that is to acquire the qualities of a female.

However, the term feminism started to be used with allusion to sexual equality and women's rights movement in the late 1890s (Singh 1). According to Marya Shéliga-Loevy in *Les hommes féministes, Revue Encyclopédique Larousse*, many scholars in the field of women studies agree upon that the term "feminism" was first coined in France by Charles Fourier, the French philosopher socialist and thinker, in his book *Theorie des Quatre Mouvements et des Destinées Generales* in 1837. Whereas, Offen Karen in *Defining Feminism: a Comparative Historical Approach*, suggests that the term feminism comes from the French word *féminisme* which was erroneously been first attributed to the French philosopher and utopian socialist, Charles Fourier, which appeared in France in 1830, till it was later on used by the French Hubertine Auclert who first advocated to women's suffrage right in 1882 and used the term in her periodical *La Citoyenne* (126). By the late 1890s the word had jumped the Atlantic to Argentina and the United States, though it seems they were not commonly used in the United States much before 1910 (Offen 127).

According to the Cambridge online dictionary "feminism is defined as the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state" ('Feminism). Sushila Singh, in her article " Recent Trend in Feminist Thought: A Tour de Horizon" in *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English*, states that 'feminism' "As a philosophy of life, it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep - seated causes of women's oppression. It is a concept of 'raising the consciousness' of an entire culture" (22).

The term 'feminism' itself is used to describe any cultural, political or economic movement aiming for attaining equal rights and legal protection for women as same as men. Nonetheless, the terms 'feminism' and 'feminist' did not gain true widespread

prominence until the 1970s when they started to be used in the public parlance more frequently (Offen 126). Historically, the feminist existence was the procreation of the discrimination and oppression caused by the patriarchy system, a system that gives the man the complete freedom to control the woman in every aspect of her life as his personal property. According to Lim Y.C. Linda, patriarchy is "the system of male domination and female subordination in economy, society and culture that has characterized much of human history to the present day" (220).

Constantly, feminism is a policy of natural or legitimate women struggle to be equal to men intended to change existed men's control and notorious traditions on women in society; these controls of power, expands to all areas of life; family, education, employment, politics, and culture. Accordingly, Bell Hooks, in her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, sees feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression" (1). She also defines it as a movement that intends to end all forms of women's exploitation and subordination to men (1). Feminists like Beauvoir claim that women show a transcendence in their everyday activities instead of being content with remaining as 'the other' sex. She remarks in her book, *The Second Sex*, that "one of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to announce that a woman is an individual being. She is neither the —other‖; nor an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of finding her own way to salvation" (48). Also, In a similar vein, Barbara Berg explains that feminism is "a broad movement embracing numerous phases of women's emancipation. It is the freedom from sex determined role freedom from society's oppressive restrictions, freedom to express her thought fully and to convert them freely into actions" (qtd. in Hooks 145). From all these definitions, feminism can be identified from different and conterversial view points in which each definition of feminism depends on a number of factors including one's own beliefs,

history and culture. Feminism movement was created to solve women's plights, defend their rights and free them from all forms of subjection. It seeks to cast out the ghost of inequality and sexism between genders and give women back their true value.

Before 1960s, the American women's world was limited in almost every aspect of life, from family life to the workplace and even the right to vote because women are unreasonable, that they are governed by their emotions, and that they are unable to understand politics (Brescoll 423). A woman was considered as a man's property without any right of her educational life, emotional life, religious life, professional life, sexual life, or even of her own body; even more so, she was obliged to marry in her early 20s, establish a family and devote her entire life to her husband, bear children and do the housework chores. Women took the responsibility and bore the full load to take care of their children and spend all the days in the homemaking.

Before The Married Women's Property Act 1874 ("MWPA"), men had the right to manage and dominate their wives' properties whose they acquired before and after mariage and they had the complete right to legally own them and to run them as well and to keep their wives deprived from their earnings or their own properties whereas, women could not have any of their husbands' earnings or properties (Khan 357). More importantly, divorce was another option women suffered to obtain; women always faced difficulty in getting their divorce when they had no legal "no-fault" divorce; thus, in order to get divorced, women were forced to prove wrongdoing on the part of their husbands (Mulroy 76).

Theories of male supremacy have been challenged, and it has been proved that there is no factual or scientific evidence for such doctrines. Indeed, there are certainly biological differences between the two genders, but these distinctions do not have to become the basis of a sexual discrimination in which men have the total privilege. The

analysis of many of these theories enabled many thinkers and feminist theorists to probe that patriarchy is only a man-made. As a result, feminism emerged as a movement against gender difference issues; it was an attempts led by those segregated women who stayed deprived from experiencing their rights in work, love, politics…etc. have a long history.

Historically, the term, Feminism, has existed since the 17th century. Since the period did not have a great significance in history in comparison to the modern era, the term did not gain much importance until the period which witnessed most of the feminist movement manifestations, from the 19th century to the early 20th century (Offen 127). During that period, the path of feminism had not been smooth, but rough and stormy; thus, profound reforms had to be done to solve the woman's case. Feminism comprises both the fight for women's equal rights as well as the aspirations towards the all-round liberation of women. The canon of feminist liberation goes beyond its abstract meaning as Gerda Lerner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* states: "(feminism) is not always a movement, for it can be a level of consciousness, a stance, an attitude, as well as the basis for organized effort" (Lerner 237). Likewise, Donna Hawxhurst and Sue Morrow warn "Without action, feminism is merely empty rhetoric which cancels itself out" (4). Consequently, feminism emerged as a movement concerned with gender difference issues in the social arena.

The movement has been here for many decades, since American women started to ask for their gender equal rights and protest against the prolonged unjust treatment of men's control during 1850s, when the first feminists started to advocate their thoughts about inequality and when the first suffragette movement emerged (Tilly 1). Since then, women have started working on accomplishing their goals to eliminate male supremacy and to impose their position in society. Their attempts to fulfill women's position in

society refer to a collection of feminist movements and ideologies, which flourished by the mid nineteenth century to address the broad question of how to define the real woman's identity in the American society and in the world wide. During much of its history, most feminist movements and theories were led by leaders who were predominantly middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America (Holvino 7).

Despite the difference in time, culture, place, causes, and goals, most of western feminist historians assert that all the feminist movements share the same objective, to obtain women's rights, should be considered feminist movements. Thus, the feminist movement aims at eradicating the social practices that lead to the oppression and vitctimisation of women in all areas of their lives. The feminist movement unveiled the fact that not only black American women who were suffering at that epoch ; white women in the other hand did not enjoy the prosperity and the opulence of life as most of the historical evidences claim in comparision to the black women. The new feminist movement opened a new different vision about the white American women during the 19th century. American white women dreadfully suffered from men's brutality and opression as same as the black American women suffered from the brutality of their masters.

The modern feminism emerged in the form of waves that flourished in light of the development of women's status through time representing the total refusal of men's servitude, and supporting women to free themselves from men's subordination. It flourished gradually as a modern ideology for defending women's rights and seeking their liberation from rape, sexual brutality and abuse practiced mainly by men who dominated their lives and prevented them from doing their roles in society. As feminism grew more to break the yokes of men's patriarchy and liberate silenced women, it

extended around countries and crossed men's boundaries. To identify the multitude forms of oppression that were faced by American women, Maggie Humm divided the movement into three apparent waves and each wave is significant for the movement in achieving different goals (251).

The First Feminist Wave began by the early 1800 and ended in 1930s. It was mainly concerned with women's right to vote. Whereas, the Second Feminist Wave took place between the 1960s and 1970s; it carried First Feminist Wave's fighting for legal social egalitarianism between men and women, but unexpectedly, developed theories and approaches that contradicted with some principles of the previous feminist era and forgot to single women (Moran 226). However these two waves paved the way for a recent development which as know as the Third Wave Feminism. Beginning in 1990s, the Third Wave Feminism refers to a continuation of, and a reaction to, second-wave, and as a reaction to, second-wave feminism (Krolokke and Sorensen 1). What is worth considering is that, as wide as this movement may seem and as many branches it adopted, each wave embodies a set of approaches dealing with different aspects of the same feminist issues, and all the different origins and colors of feminism share the same interests and solicitudes which call for making women conscious of their rights in US. Angela Carter asserts that "what unites the various kinds of feminism as a literary theory is not so much a specific technique of criticism but a common goal" (91).

I.3.1.1. First-Wave Feminism: Votes for Women

First wave feminism emerged in Europe and the United States of America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Fernandes et al. 89). The term "first wave" was coined later on, after the term "second wave" started to be used to point out to a new feminist movement. Originally, the first wave called upon the achievement of equality and property rights for American women (Moran 242). As Margaret Walters asserts in

her book *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, "for a married woman, her home becomes a prison-house. The house itself, as well as everything in it, belongs to the husband and of all fixtures the most abject is his breeding machine, the wife. Married women are in fact slaves, their situation no better than that of Negroes in the West Indies" (44). Thus, concrete actions, new paths, and modern theories were led by pioneering feminist activists opposing male privilege and women's subordination within any given society.

During this period, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) was depicted as the foundational work of the feminist movement, which played a fundamental role in laying the grounds for both the first and the second wave. In her works, De Beauvoir tackles the women's plight as the 'other' or 'second class' subjected to patriarchs (Bressler 172). Basically, this period witnessed many other pioneers for the feminist case, like Virginia Woolf, who was one of the key figures during the first-wave of feminism. In her seminal work, *A Room of One's View* (1929), Woolf developed Marry Wollstonecraft's ideas about women's rights and depicts women's opposit to the patriarchs' rule (1).

The movement emphasized on an unlimited freedom, equal opportunity, and rights including; contracts, marriage, parentage, educational rights for girls, property rights for women, the right to work under better condition and with fair wages. This current was evident in United States as feminist leaders such as Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone among others were organizing campaigns to end what is left of slavery and in 1833 Lucretia Mott was elected the first female anti slavery society in Philadelphia (Adams 7).

Later in 1848, 300 American suffragettes led by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton met in the first Women Right's Convention in which they declared "it is

the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise" (Kuersten 203). Mainly, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) were both created in an attempt to promote suffrage (Banner 115). After the long run, between 1910 and the early 1920, the wave ended with the passage of some of major female demands which were achieved at that time. One of the most important achievements of the feminist movement in the USA was the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment which was included to the United States Constitution in 1919 that granted women over the age of 30 the right to vote in all states (Fernandes et al. 90). However, in 1971 the 26th amendment was ratified granting all women in all the states the right to vote by the age of 18.

The main point feminists have stressed about gender inequality is that it is not an individual matter, but is deeply ingrained in the structure of the American societies. By the late nineteenth century, after women political success by securing their right to vote, feminist activists began to shift their focus from questions of equality between women and men to other issues that serve the woman's cause and which are mainly concerned with women's personal rights; for example, calling for improved welfare provision for mothers and children. These factors were signs which affected the American community in general and which presented a shared dilemma for all women that paved the way for the second wave of feminism.

I.3.1.2. Second-Wave Feminism: The Personal is Political

Second-wave feminism refers mainly to the continuation of the earlier phase of feminism movement involving the suffragettes in the UK and USA in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. This was a time when "there was an increasing entry of women into higher education, the establishment of academic women's studies courses

and departments and feminist thinking in many other related fields such as politics, sociology, history and literature, and a time when there was increasing questioning of accepted standards and authority" (Bressler 172). The scholar Estelle Freedman compares first and second-wave feminism stating that the first wave of feminism focused on promoting equal rights such as suffrage for women, whereas the second wave was largely concerned with other political issues of equality, such as ending discrimination.

Since the second wave had a slightly different goal it needed a new designation. The slogan "The Personal is Political" is an expression which was coined by the feminist activist Carol Hanisch and used as a title to her 1969 essay which highly reflected women's efforts for liberation during the second wave (Rogan and Budgeon 2). "Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting their identity structures" (Fernandes et al. 90).Bressler argues that in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan explored "the roots of the change in women's roles from essential workforce during World War II to homebound housewife and mother after the war, and assessed the forces that drove this change in perception of women's roles" (172).

Though, the American first wave feminism guaranteed the suffrage right for women in all the US states by the ratification of the 19th Amendment which was included into the US Constitution, more pressing demands were sooner adopted. Despite the fact that, the first wave mainly focused on rights, the second wave came as another different form of feminism, asking to speak out for other issues of equality. It defends women's position into society throughout several demands such as; equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand, financial and legal independence. It deliberated to put an end to all forms of

discrimination against lesbians. Furthermore, it craved for woman's right to define her own sexuality, freedom from violence or sexual coercion to all women regardless of their marital status. Also, this movement exclaimed to an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women. These considerations greatly molded the feminist theory, ultimately succeeded bringing about a new and more outward mode for women's identity in USA.

Second-wave feminism has continued since that time and coexisted with what is termed "Third-Wave Feminism" which came as a new phase in the aftermath of the 1990s. Lately, the picture had been changed, as the second wave feminist activists slowly lost their true demands of singledom, autonomy and equality. As more and more the feminist theory of the second wave turned away from the feminist case and shifted focus on other national affairs like the Vietnam War which gained more prominence during that time (Moran 225).The Women's Liberation Movement slowly lost its significance in the American community, until the third wave flourished.

I.3.1.3. The Third Wave Feminist: Transversal Politics

When the second wave of feminism fractured and fell in the mid-1980s, new form of feminism appeard known as the third wave of feminism and sometimes refers to post-feminism. Arising as a continuation and reaction to the shortcomings and the perceived failures of the second wave ideas and activities like women in pornography, sex work, and prostitution and also as a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. The third wave feminists generally consider themselves as the most powerful, the effective and the strongest group between all the other previous activists of feminism. However, the movement's focus has slightly shifted; it is less focused on political processes and on laws but more on the individual self.

Generally, third wave feminist has a completely new version of feminism as R. Claire Snyder points out to Findlen statement when he argues about feminists' third wave view saying "We are the first generation for whom feminism has been entwined in the fabric of our lives; it is natural that many of us are feminists. . . . This country hasn't heard enough from young feminists. We're here, and we have a lot to say about our ideas and hopes and struggles and our place within feminism" (178). Third-wave feminists generally distinguish themselves as 'free' women, irrepressible, mainly independent from men. For instance, Kathleen Hannah, a famous American singer who founded the band of riot grrrl Bikini Kill (1990- 1998), says in one of her songs "I won't stop talking. I'm a grrrl you have no control over. There is not a gag big enough to handle this mouth" (Krolokke and Sorensen 18).

These new generations of feminists believed that the best way to make this third wave effective more than the last ones is by developing and changing the ways and the methods of looking for the rights of women. They started by using terms, which were simple and strong; like instead of saying woman they were saying 'girl' to attract the new generation to the importance of feminism; they created the image of the "New Woman" (Krolokke and Sorensen 18).

Those feminists spread their thoughts and inspirations about feminism by using modern and creative tools and ways of technology like TV, magazines, radio and recently the net. This movement challenged the prevalent thoughts and took the liability of removing all the stereotypical and typical images of the traditional women by dismantling and divestiture all the abusive ideas to women like sexist language, unfair terms used both for girls and women. Schneiders describes the third wave feminism as a movement of liberation: "This movement is concerned not simply with the social, political, and economic equality of women with men but with a fundamental

reimagination of the whole of humanity in relation to whole of reality, including non-human creation" (98). In fact, they wanted to finish what the previous phases of feminism attempted to accomplish, they were determined to prove that the third wave feminism is powerful and effective not only by words but also by actions and decisions. In addition to that, their first and most important goal was avoiding putting and classifying women into categories and removing stereotypical images.

Unlike the first and the second wave where feminists were mostly Westerners, middle-class, white women, the third wave feminists included women from diverse ethnicities, colors, religions and social backgrounds (Moran 261). The specific American term for the third-wave feminism is "grrl feminism", and in Europe is known as "new feminism", also known under the connotation of; Girlie feminism, riot grrl feminism, cybergrrl feminism, or transfeminism, feminism is breathing and beating. The new 'new feminism' is characterized by local, national and transnational activism. Third wave feminists address themselves as "capable, strong, and assertive social agents" (Krolokke and Sorensen 15).

In *Not My Mother's Sister* (2004), Henry Astrid makes a convincing case that third wave feminis is characterized with the distinctive feature that feminist during that era rebelled mainly against all what restricted them including men, husbands, goverment, laws and all what limit them from their independence as free girl. This wave of feminism generally adressed young generation of women more than the old generation i.e. daughters against mothers who rejected the universalist claim that all women share a set of common experiences (117). This period is characterized with the appearance of many literary works as well as many famous feminist theorists, scholars and writers like; *The Vagina Monologues* written by Eve Ensler in addition to others like Willa Shalit and Elizabeth Wurtzel.

Finally, each of the feminist waves discussed before has played an important role in feminist theories and politics starting from the 1960s until now. They paved the way to other waves and movements to appear and played a significant role in helping the woman to get her social, political, cultural, religious and sexual rights each one in its own different way.

I.3.2. The Quest for Identity in Feminist Theory

Identity is who a person is. It generally refers to "the unique characteristics of a person, including personality traits, personal values, opinions and preferences, physical characteristics, and career and lifestyle choices. In other words, these refer to aspects of a person's identity that are distinct and different from other people" (Fearon 5). However, any person can go through an identity quest or crisis in which it describes the periods of personal uncertainty or confusion ("Identity Crisis"). In this regard, the woman's identity crisis is that where a woman resists the social traditions imposed on her and struggles as a human being in its full sense against those forces of society that restrict, deprive her and deny her as a social being in comparison to man. Thus, the recognition of selfhood and fulfilling one's identity are viewed as an inherent feature of women's literature.

The role of the woman and issues relating to women's identity are recurring themes in the American literature emanating from the feminist movement from the early 1960s (Walters 96). While issues relating to gender generally enable the construction of female identity in social terms and the domestic context, a variety of other, more modern models of the female identity in public contexts are allocated to women in American society and literature. Consequently, 'the female quest of identity' won the attention of most female writers during and after the WWII as a self-reflection of alienation women experienced within their life.

The tendency to alienation and exploitation was already so deep rooted in women's minds and intermingled with the traditional traits imposed on them by the social system that the quest of identity did not even arise in their minds since she has been performing this role of ideal and obedient wife for so long that, her submission to man's commands seemed like an everlasting fate of her life. Germaine Greer and Jennifer Baumgardner in their book, *The Female Eunuch,* have aptly commented: "Women have been charged with deviousness and duplicity since the dawn of civilization so they have never been able to pretend that their masks were anything but masks" (129). Greer reflects clearly about the abusive image was given to women as submissive creatures, and that all what women experienced never revealed their real identity. On that account, after the WWII, women felt the need to express themselves. Mainly, women wanted to stand as a whole self, as a full human being, equal to man in society. They did not want themselves to be known on the behalf of someone's daughter, wife or mother rather, he sought separation from these restricted relations they quested their identity that shows them who they are.

It is not until the 1990s that female authors start to show a revived interest in women's issue. From that time, the process of writing becomes an expression of woman's identity; it allows them to throw off repression and to struggle for identifying their real identity (Coward 55). Accordingly, most of feminist works are generally characterised with the theme of the quest of identity in which all the heroines are searching for something within their life in the novel, in which is mostly claimed that it is a self reflection of the writer's personal experience in life (Sankar and Nathiyal 328-29). Through their stories, the writers present their heroines as an uncompleted puzzle, fragmented, alianated, unstable characters who feel emptiness and sadness and who travel back to their childhood through flashbacks, to the their adulthood as old women

in the thirties and fourties of their age, or vice versa, but not matured enough or unsatisfied of the world surrounding them including family, husband, kids, work or personality. These factors reflect the psychological state of most of the American women during the 19th and the 20th century in which the story is written in or when the story was written in.

Generally, feminist novels present a typical example of a Bildungsroman-- sometimes called the Frauenroman -- Novels about the transition from girlhood to womanhood have historically been more about "growing down," in Annis Pratt's famous phrase, "than growing up" (qtd. in Lazzaro-Weis 24). Labovitz argues "… this new genre [the female Bildungsroman] was made possible only when Bildung became a reality for women, in general, and for the fictional heroine, in particular" (qtd. in Kar 6-7). Social and cultural changes made it possible for women to share the social, political professional domains and engage in exploring their identity which was concealed a long time ago under man's domination.

The female Bildungsroman of those times depicted the "suppression and defeat of female autonomy, creativity, and maturity by patriarchal gender norms". In the article "The Female Bildungsroman: A Critical Overview", Indrahit Kar asserts Labovitz's definition of the female Bildungsroman she states: " In her concluding chapter Labovitz approaches a definition of the female Bildungsroman which follows a female protagonist from her adolescence to maturity focusing mainly on friendship and family, education and career, love and marriage. Like her male counterpart, the female protagonist, in her search for self-development and self-knowledge, goes through experiences that are both necessary and desirable" (5).

Indraji Kar explains the evolution of the female Bildungsroman as a way to develop the heroines self-awareness raising and thus her female identity in the feminist

literary canon she clarifies: "Unlike the male hero, however, the female heroine's quest for growth takes place under completely different circumstances: "Bildung would function from her life experience rather than from a priori lessons to be learned", Labovitz maintains. Instead of learning by reason, by basing decisions on previous knowledge, like the male hero, the female protagonist grows by learning from life itself" (Kar 5). Both Kar's and Labovitz's arguments consider that the contemporary female novel of self-discovery is a fundamentally optimistic literary form, which studies women's identification of themselves within their lives, and thus follows the heroines in their search for identity discovery and resolution of their self-fragmentation as a challenge to the imposed social norms. Labovitz adds her view about the role of the female Bildungsroman in mirroring the female's identity growth and in other words identity constuction, she explains:

> A defining characteristic of the female Bildungsroman is that the female
> protagonist's search for self-knowledge has a more negative effect on her
> because she feels burdened by social injustices, as she cannot yet take
> action to solve the problems. However, once she discovers her identity
> and place in society, then she can begin to develop. Her journey towards
> self-realization will be promoted or hampered by her self-education and
> ideological testing. (qtd. in Kar 5)

In 1986, Esther Kleinbord Labovitz published her study *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. She finds it remarkable that the 19th century was the beginning of the bildungsroman novel; since most of the feminist novels of the post-feminist movement concentrate on the self development of the heroine, so the majority of feminist novels portray the self-quest of identity of a female protagonist. The artist heroines in the bildungsroman face many difficulties due

to loss and uncertainty which reflect their past, uncertainties about their identity and the need to find answers regarding their identities "…to seek self-realization in the service of art…" (qtd. in Brändström 15). In other words, the heroines strive to overcome the obstacles in their personal and literary life. They try to find a way to discover their inner and overcome the feeling of fragmentation they live in. This fragmentation and identity crisis is mainly caused by the opression of the social standars, norms and traditions or generally due the emptiness the heroine feels after her independence from the patriachal and social straits. Thus, the feminist writers of the Bildungsroman present their female characters releasing these inner confusion and frustrations through words (Cixous 250). Helene Cixous asserts: "Woman must write herself, must write about woman and bring woman to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text--as into the world and into history by her own movement" (250).

Feminist critic Rita Felski discusses the theme of self-discovery in her ger chapter which scrutinizes and introduces an overview of feminist literary theory and feminist literature to the novel of *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989). She views that the 19th century heroine's of the feminist novel "… trajectory remains limited to the journey from the parental to the marital home and … [her] destiny remains permanently linked to that of her male companion" (125). Felski divides the genre of female Bildungsroman into two models: the self-discovery narrative and the feminist Bildungsroman. "For instance, unlike the male hero in the literary theory who tries to discover his identity without any social contraits, the female protagonist has to struggle to find her real identity by freeing herself from marital subordination and dependence" (qtd. in Brändström 8). Another gender difference is

that while the male Bildungsroman mainly covers the protagonist's in specific age mainly childhood and adolescence, the female quest of identity follows the heroine's life for a wider time span.

Laura Sue Fuderer adds in her annotated bibliography *The Female Bildungsroman in English* (1990), "[d]iscussions of the female bildungsroman [sic] began to appear in the critical literature in the early 1970s, when critics recognized its rise as a reflection of the contemporary feminist movement" (Fuderer 2). A few years earlier, in 1983, the feminist critic Susan Fraiman published her study of female novels of development, in which she highlights the issue of marriage. She states: "There are different circumstances for the choice of marriage for the male hero and female heroine, whereas the hero typically marries when he is a mature young man who has decided upon a career choice and has found his place in society, the heroine typically marries when she is still a young woman who has not yet found her identity" (Fraiman 129).

The portrayal of the female heroine for her quest of identity had always been a key element and a paramount of the contemporary feminist literary canon. Though, this latter could not gain this significance in the literary theory only after along history full of struggles, sufferaning, political, social and economical reforms by salient and eminent feminist figures who succedeed in attaining women's rights all arround America. Women's victory in the American history turned the traditional stereotypical view of the American society towards woman. Thus, the feminist American history witnessed a dramatical change at the national arena as many female leaders fought to gain all women's rights including sufferage, work, education, protection from rape, sexual abuse, physical brutality and psychological traumas caused mainly by men.

The new portrayal of the female heroine in the American feminist literature changed the negative social view to women given by men whose their sole aim was to

keep women bound to the house chores only as an example, Marthing Luther who once announced : "Women should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children. A woman is, or at least should be, a friendly, courteous, and a merry companion in life, the honour and ornament of the house, and inclined to tenderness, for thereunto are they chiefly created, to bear children, and to be the pleasure, joy and solace of their husbands". Therefore, they succedeed in saving many discriminated and victimized women from the anguish they suffered from beyond the domestic life as a wife, a daughter and a mother as women used to be considered as man's object and own property only. Their struggle took a long trip divided into different phases, the three feminist movement waves, each movement was characterized with different feminist concerns but all serve the feminist cause and attempt to quest for her natural rights and live with no fear from any form of discrimination and abuse.

Consequently, female writers adopt the feminist case from a wide dimension and broke the suffering and silence of the American women were trapped in for millenia because of men's domination and gender inequality system and brought the feminist theory and women's representation in literature as a consequential element of their writings. All these efforts of the long history succedeed ultimately in offering all American women the equality and the good life conditions they have already deserved from a long time.

Chapter Two: Who am I?

In America, after the Civil War, women's literature gained widespread prominence by the end of the 19th century. As the country witnessed dramatical changes and transformation, including; economic, social, political and literary reforms, female authors were forging a place for themselves in the literary canon (Gardiner 348). At that time, there have been numerous American writers who used their literary works as a mean to present the major historical events and the social issues which influenced the American societies during that era.

Issues like marriage, family, sexual relationships, and women's vain struggle against the oppressive patriarchal agents were some of what many writers intended to explore and analyse on the light of Feminism. Hélène Cixous has stated: "Woman must write herself, must write about woman and bring woman to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text--as into the world and into history by her own movement" (Cixous 250). Marilyn French as a feminist writer investigates such issues in her writings mainly pertaining to the status of women in patriarchal societies as an attempt to dismantle the patriarchal ideologies which have made women's subjection a commonplace (Akdogan 195). Furthermore, French tries to expose the inner psyche of her female characters, especially that of the middle class women who are burdened with mental stress, unfulfilled aspirations and unsatisfied desires, and which reflect the American women after the feminist renaissance in the aftermath of the 19th century.

Since the present work is done to examine the way identity was destructed by the social expectations of the patriarcal traits and beliefs and their impact on the development of the female identity, this chapter will be presented as a scrutinized

analysis of the writer's protagonist, Mira Ward, childhood in her search for identity. It is divided into three sections. This chapter will focus on the possibility of Mira's quest for identity to adapt and to intermingle into the social norms of the American society or not. As it will study Mira's experience and endeavor to attain a unique identity in the shadow of the patriarchal norms which worked for a long time to dismiss the female identity and existence from the American publich spheres.

The first section presents a general biography to Marilyn French's life; as it provides a synopsis of the novel and the most significant events that draw the general plot of the narrative. The second section will deal with Mira's childhood in her perplexity about herself and all the surroundings of her society as Mira will encounter confusing experiences in her childhood life that make her wonder about herself and everything around her and look for a crucial answer for her dilemma 'Who am I?". Whilst, the third section will continue to follow Mira's childhood as it will cover Mira's society and examines the impacts of the American patriarchal social norms on women during the 1950s. This latter takes a picture of the patriarchal system in America during the 1950s and 1960s depicting Mira's childhood struggle in her quest for identity in relation to the brutality and abuse practised on the female identity construction.

II. Who am I? The Quest for Identity in *The Women's Room*

Identity is a convertible term which can be defined from different sides. It depends on people's way of viewing themselves and how other people perceive them. And since woman's it the most influenced with the biological and psychological changes within herself, she may enter in periods when she doubts her abilities, her look and her role and relation with all persons in the society. Sankar and R. Soundararajan in their article "Female Quest for Self-Identity and Women Subjections in Margaret Atwood's" give a scrutinized definition of identity they argue:

There are several ways through which an identity is formed; having self-knowledge which has been created through one's personal history, experience of childhood and one's membership to a certain society thus defines the person's concept of himself according to the set of norms of the given culture. These characteristics are essential to develop a stable personal identity and when these are complex or problematic the individual has to face struggle in the process of identity construction, so to speak, the person needs to find his place in society, resolve the problems of existing personality discrepancies, feelings of displacement and alienation from his culture. (40-1)

In their definition, it is clear that the invidual identity is what defines people and gives them that unique traits and characteristics, especially during the person's childhood which is remarkable as the basis of one's identity construction. Thus, identity is what differentiates one from another; it is what characterizes each individual as a unique creature. This specific mental and psychological aspect of the mind is granted by the interaction with the social individuals in the society of both genders, men and women, and also, by the acceptance in the society.

Female identity is defined by Judith Kegan Gardiner as "the concept of female identity provides a key to understanding the special qualities of contemporary writing by women. Because the concept of identity includes a number of variables, it can explain the diverse ways in which writing by women differs from writing by men more fully than can a theory that poses any single opposition as the explanation" (348). A woman's identity is her ego and how she perceives herself as an effective member in the society where she struggles against all forces including; men, social norms, traditions

and patriarchal rules of the community which restrict her, reject her as an indepent individual and regard her as inferior creature in comparison to man (Akdogan 194).

The Women's room is about marital disharmony and maladjustment in a husband-wife relationship. The novel tells the story of a female who searches for her identity in a society which silences women's voice and gives supremacy to men in all domains inside and outside the domestic sphere. Throughout her journey, the protagonist of the story, Mira, faces both sexual and psychological questions and dilemmas. Sexual exploitation and identity quest are highlighted in the story through which all women in the narrative are oppressed because of patriarchial social norms and principles (Blum 3). Marilyn French portrays the themes of sexual exploitation and patriarchal abuse and their effect on Mira's quest for her independent identity. In the light of the novel, French gives a deep insight into other women's and females's marital life who lived under the same harsh circumstances in which the protagonist passed through the same dehumanising conditions. Though, Mira, the main character, resists, fights and defeats social patriarchial violating rules; unfortunately, she can't escape her feeling of loneliness and she always finds herself alone despite her struggles to overcome all the social gendered principles and norms.

II.1. An Introduction to *The Women's Room* and the author: Marilyn French

II.1.1. The Author: Marilyn French

Marilyn French is an American feminist writer and literary critic; she is one of the notable American authors and one of the bestselling writers of both fiction and non-fiction. Marilyn in her writings, contributed to reveal women's plights within the social and domestic boundries. She attributed her growing awareness to tackle mainly women's issues; hidden lives, monstrosity of marriage, passionate desires, sexuality, rape, and other complexities.

French's major works include *The Women's Room (1977)* which was translated into twenty languages, a reason for French to devote her life to writing and to her audience*, The Bleeding Heart* (1980), *Her Mother's Daughter* (1987), *Our Father* (1994), *In the Name of Friendship* (2006), *My Summer with George* (1996)*, and A Season in Hell* (1998), and her final novel *The Love Children* which was published after she died in September 2009. In addition to her fiction, Marilyn wrote many nonfiction pieces focusing on women's history which include *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (1985) and *The War Against Women* (1992). However, what is often thought of as her most significant nonfiction work, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women* (2003), is a staggering four volume project that documented women's lives from the earliest evidence of history to the twenty first century.

Marilyn French was born in Brooklyn, New York on November 21st 1929 from Polish descent. Her parents are Charles Edwards, an engineer, and her mother was Isabel Hazz Edwards who worked as a department store clerk. Despite the family's poverty, French's mother encouraged her to carry on her studies and education. Marilyn French graduated from Hofstra College in Long Island in 1951 with undergraduated degrees in English and philosophy. Marilyn recalled that during her life, her mother occupied the role of the dominant parent in her childhood in which Marilyn adopted that as a plea from her mother in not bowing to male authority. Such plea influenced Marilyn's view to female and male relationship and which is reflected in most of Marilyn's work. In 1950, Marilyn Edwards got married to the lawyer, Robert French Jr. And by 1953 she gave birth to two lovely children, Robert and Jamie. However, the couple's marriage was reported as unhappy marriage in which French described her marriage as horrible and her husband as a monster once he was at home.

Like the case of other women at her time, French has always supported and encouraged her husband while he discouraged her ambitions and dreams of success. She attended Hofstra College in 1951 to study English literature and philosophy; after the birth of her two children, Marilyn returned to Hofstra to finish her Master degree. When the couple divorced after seventeen years of marriage, Marilyn attended Harvard University to study for her Ph.D where she recieved her Doctorate at Harvard University in 1972. Marilyn French is viewed by many critics and scholars as "radical feminist who attacked the root of our social ills as embodied in power relationships" (Baghdibidi 87). Moreover, Marilyn French writes about "the misuse of power in relationships...to determine the premises of patriarchial institution"(87). Marylin French died at her home in Manhattan at age 79, on May 2nd 2009 leaving a great influence in the literary scene through her distinguished artistic works.

In 1977, French published her famous novel *The Women's Room* which contained the eminent quoted remark 'all men are rapists' and which changed the lives of many similar cases like Marilyn's case. The story within it recounts a national issue if not transcultural one. This fictional work is considered as a reflection and an influence of Marilyn's personal experiences throughout her life as, a single lady, married and divorced woman, and which examines and depicts the violence towards women in patriarchal societies in America, India, China and the Muslim world as well. The novel follows Mira Ward, during her feminist awakening who lives as a submissive housewife in the 1950s before separating from her husband, Norm, and sets to study at Harvard University where she meets a group of divorced women who support her and encourage her after her divorce. As a feminist work, *The Women's Room* gave French a high reputation among authors and a large percentage of readability (Semic 258-9).

II.1. 2. *A Synopsis of The Women's Room*

  The Women's Room is Marilyn French's best known novel with almost seven hundred pages which was published in 1977. Though the author denied that the work is considered an autobiographical work, the novel still discusses the similar details of the author's life. *The Women's Room* is still praised till today from many critics for its unflinching portrayal of sexual, physical and psychological violence women expeience in day to day life.

  The story follows the developement of Mira Ward's life, who represents a typical example of a rebellious middle class female during her childhood. Whilst she was young, her mother taught her how to be a proper lady, and advise Mira not to accept to comply to men's temptations and rules and to look for her true belonging instead. Even as a child, Mira always knew that the restrictions placed on girls were stifling and that boys have always more freedom in life than for girls.

  In highschool, Mira had a boyfriend called Lanny, who most of the time ignored her which on one occasion caused her to get drunk, so she spent the whole night dancing with other men in the bar where Lanny used to take her to and which she had always hated. After that night, Lanny and her friends and the students in the highschool started to indict Mira for being a "loos" and that she was not faithful. Here, Mira recognized that her relationship with Lanny can never be successful and that she should break up with him despite her love and her feelings for him. She realized that she did not want to marry Lanny because he would ignore her in life exactly like how he always ignored her when she was with him, and that he, like all the other males, would leave her alone at home cleaning the floor, preparing food and taking care of the children.

  In college, Mira's fear of men grows as she sees all men enjoy a complete freedom which lead her to isolate herself away from any kind of men's relationship or

physical intimacy, afraid of becoming pregnant as her mother always warned her. One night, after a whole night of drinking and dancing, Mira is nearly gang raped by some of her friends, further confirming her constant fear.

Eventually, Mira meets Norm, a medical student and a son of one of the family's friends. Mira confesses to Norm about her fear of sexual intimacy and her fear of being raped and pregnancy. Norm tells Mira that marriage is her only way of salvation from all her fears and the only way to be protected from men. Thus, the couple gets married and has two sons, Normie and Clarck. However, this marriage is like any other bounded marriage which brings Mira to lose her independence and freedom that she has always feared. During her marriage, Mira is obliged to leave College and act the role of any other housewife; she takes menial jobs to support her husband as he attends medical school.

During her first years of marriage, Mira develops friendship with three women in her neighbourhood: Natalie, Adele, and Bliss whom are all married and have children. The relationship between Mira and her neighbours breaks down when the wives accuse each other of having an affair with each wife's husband and Mira prefers to dismiss them. Later on, Mira and Norm move to a new small town 'Beau Reve', where Mira meets new friends: Lily, Samantha, and Martha. Yet, with time, Mira's marriage becomes meaningless, and Mira finds herself left at home alone, scrubbing the floors and taking care of her two children while her husband goes out neglecting her studies and her accomplishments to live free and independent. However, Mira witnesses how her friends' lives are ruined one after the other. Samantha's husband leaves her, and she is obliged to leave her house; and Lily has a mental breakdown as a result of her son's constant rebelliousness; and Martha has an affair with a married man who has recently gotten his wife pregnant. It is through her friendship to these ladies that she

understands the unfair advantages given to women in their relationships with men in which women are always alone with their children, men are not found in the scenes. What a tragedy it is for American women.

After years of marriage, Norm files for divorce. Yet, he quickly remarries again, which leads Mira to think that her ex-husband may have already been having an affair with another woman and she gets into a mental neurosis in which Mira finds herself emotionally adrift and alone for which she tries to commit suicide but fortunately, her friend Martha, intervenes and helps Mira to overcome her depression. After her divorce, Mira goes to Harvard University to study for her Ph.D. She applies a job as a teacher of grammar which she hates and there she meets Val, a divorcee and radical feminist who along with her daughter are joined by Mira and are able to verbalize their ideas about liberal feminism and resistence against patriarchy and gender discrimination. For the first time Mira finds a space to reveal her fears from men's freedom, and the discontent about the role of women in society.

It is during the height of the women's liberation movement where Mira meets Ben, a handsome and respected man, who treats Mira well. Mira falls for Ben and she loves him dearly like this is her first time; she learns happiness and independence at once. But, as soon as Mira Knows that Ben expects from her to occupy home and to be a housewife and take care of his children, she chooses to leave him; she chooses to leave him because she fears to be Mira of the past, Mira who lived with Norm and took care of everyone except herself. This fear and disdain grow even more mainly after Chris's (Val's daughter) accident of rape whilst she was at school. An accident that makes Mira believes that all men are rapists, with no exceptions.

Val was later died in an explosion between a group of feminist activists and other policemen as Val tried to rescue Anitta Morrow (a black woman who was

attacked by a white man at night who tried to rape her. Morrow stabbed him to defend herself. However Anita was sentenced to twenty years to life for first-degree murder as the prosecutor claimed that Anitta was a prostitute and that prostitutes cannot be raped) on ther day of sentencing her. On the day when Anita was to be transferred to the state prison (because she was deemed unreliable and dangerous to society), Val's group of women arrived singly disguised as just women. Then suddenly, they mobilized in a circle, pulling guns out of skirts and coats. All of a sudden, the women exploded as they had been carrying grenades. Val's was one of the exploded bodies.

The book ends with the Mira's life at the age of fourty working as a teacher in, Maine, a small isolated college, and with her discovery that Ben is married to his secretary and that the couple have two children. It also ends by the narrator who begins to write the story that the readers have just read.

II.2. Mira, the Child, and the Beginning of Identity Quest in *The Women's Room*

The Women's Room is a story that depicts the life of, Mira, a girl's quest for an identity among fractured and fragmented identities. From the early events of the narrative, Mira finds herself completely different from the little children and the other girls who are always playing in streets, Mira spends most of her time in educating herself and developing her intellectual capacities. At eight years old, Mira seeks to discover her identity independently; however, as she seeks such knowledge, she always gets disapointed each time she finds her own discoveries in others' books or when her mother refuses to answer her questions. Through the questions about Mira's identity, French exposes the most inhumane and exploitative nature of American gender system.

The Women's Room opens with the narrator describing Mira, at age thrity eight, who is hiding at the ladies' room looking to the mirror and trying to see her whole body, but her attempts go in vain. Mira can only see fragmented parts of herbody, eyes, hands,

and legs but not her whole body. She writes "she stepped back again to see her whole self. She could not do it" (French ch.1; sec. 2). The narrator through these words, indicates that Mira is alone, fragmented with distorted ideas about who she is; she could not recognize herself nor her body, she is trying to discover who she is but her efforts are meaningless, she only tastes her meanness (Akdogan 197). In this regard, French compares Mira's disability to have one core picture of herself to her deficiency of writing which symbolizes the different fragmented identities Mira struggles to relate them together as one single identity that belongs to one unique body as she states 'whereas if you really know how to write, rules about leading sentences and paragraphs and so forth don't exist. Writing is hard for me. The best I can do is put down bits and pieces, fragments of time, fragments of lives' (ch. 1; sec. 4). Mira's fragmented image in the mirror with her mouth which does not match with her face and her orange hair which seemed too ugly and her legs which seem too thin in comparision to her big body show how Mira sees herself as an incomplete fragmented self. She cannot understand herself or define her identity. She does not know why she is alone. Mira's disability to have a complete image of heself is an evidence of the crisis of identity she suffers from.

French shows how Mira struggles to find her own unique identity, she states "What's to fear, after all, in a silly woman always running for the mirror to see who she is" (French ch. 1; sec. 8). The narrator points out that if a woman does not have an identity, no one will recognize her or care for her existence, She comments "Mira lived by her mirror as much as the queen in Snow White. A lot of us did: we absorbed and believed the things people said about us" (ch. 1; sec. 8). She adds, "You think she was vain and shallow" (French ch. 1; sec. 3). It is in the first pages that French explains Mira's thirst for self discovey and independance. She says "It was these that, passing her without seeing her, seeing her without looking at her, had driven her into hiding. For

they had made her feel invisibile" (ch.1; sec. 2). Feeling invisible confuses Mira about her identity crises; it causes her isolation and loneliness. Which in return makes her think that seeking one's identity means insanity and madness and this drives her to hide in the ladies' room staring at the walls and wondering about the reason behind her lonliness "I am going to try to let the voices out. Maybe they will help me understand how they ended as they did, how I ended here feeling engulfed and isolated at the same time. Somehow it all starts with Mira. How did she manage to get herself, at the age of thirty-eight, to hide in that toilet?" (ch. 1; sec. 4).

The narrative shifts to shed the light on Mira the child and gives a deep description of her emotional and mental development. Unlike the other girls of her age, Mira was different and more adventurous, in other words more responsible and more questioning about the surroundings. Mira's identity is far different from that of the other girls and boys in her class. The narrator vividly points out that Mira is outside of her peer group, especially in class French explains "she was bright child; she finished all the text books on the first days of school, and bored,...the solution decided was to move her ahead, into a class' more on her level" (ch. 1; sec. 5). She adds "She was moved ahead several times, but never found such a class" (ch.1; sec. 5). Mira was not a member of any group; her family was avoid of close connections, and her friendships with other girls or boys her own age were nonexistent, even her aspirations and capacities were more elevated. She spent her free time with her quest of why she was like that or why were girls and boys arround her behaving in 'these manners'.

In the lights of the preceding quotes, the narrator points that Mira has a reason behind her self-discovery which is being and feeling different. Mira believes that she is different and acts according to that. Although her mother, Mrs. Ward trials to teach her femininity and how to be and act as a proper lady, Mira disobeys her parents and social

rules and insists on finding her own ways in life as an attempt to solve the ambiguity imposed on her in the first place and on all the women she knows in the second place leaving Mira with one core question 'why are men superior than women?' The narrator comments: "At home, Mrs Ward taught her not to cross her legs at the knee, not to climb trees with boys, not to play tag in the alley, not to speak in a raised voice, not to wear more than three pieces of jewelry at a time, and never mix gold with silver. When these lessons had been learned, she considered Mira" Finished"" (ch. 1; sec. 5).

Mira, the child, showed an independent identity from the beginning of her childhood. In the novel, Mira was depicted as an innocent little girl who was eager to reveal her independence and unmask herself. Unlike her classmates and the other children in the neighborhood, Mira announced her femininity clearly by taking off her clothes publicly and taking a stroll to the local candy store. However, due to the harsh rules, the second time she did this, she was taken home by a policeman. Because of her misbehaviour, her mother punished her for disrobing publicly by tying her with a long rope to a stake in the backyard, so that she could keep sight of her.

French's depiction of Mira's disrobing and the intervention of both the police and her mother presents an image of the tough consequences any woman may face at the domestic level or at the legal level. The writer presents the dangerous outcomes of acting independently for girls. Mira's behaviour 'unclothing herself publicly' symbolizes her attempt to have independent identity and to imitate the boys she used to see naked on their motorcycles which leads Mira to be tight in the backyard (Hovet et al. 153-4). The narrator comments:

Mira was an independent baby, fond of removing her clothes and taking a stroll on a summer's day to the local candy store. The second time she was returned home by a policeman she had directed. Mrs Ward began to

tie her up. She did not mean to be unkind: Mira had been crossing a busy

boulevard. She used a long rope, so Mira could still move around, and

tied it to the handle of the front door. Mira continued in her disconcerting

habit of removing all her clothes, however. Mrs Ward did not believe in

corporal punishment and used stern reproach and withdrawal of affection

instead. It worked. Mira had trouble removing all her clothes on her

wedding night. In time, Mira's fury and tears at being tied up abated, and

she learned to operate within a small space, digging into things since she

was not permitted to range outward. The leash was then removed, and

Mira showed herself to be a docile and even timid child, only somewhat

given to sullenness. (French ch.1; sec. 5)

French portrays the family restrictions imposed on Mira in her childhood as a

way to raise Mira according the the social norms shared between all the society at that

time. Mrs Ward's punishement and the robe used to tie Mira for her misbehaviors of

unclothing herself, symbolizes the restrictions of the society where Mira was raised in

and describes their attempts to keep Mira unfree, restricted, and deprived from being

'who she is' and unmask her identity; they tied Mira to the existing social traditions.

French depicts Mira's self-awareness of her identity in her resistence of the social

restrictions and ideologies imposed on women despite her family's attempts to shape

Mira's identity according to the social norms. During her childhood, Mira hed always

escaped from such limitations and restriction of how a woman should behave or act.

French affirms the point that not all women are the same, in her narrative; she clearly

clarifies the core of women's quest for identity as a different and unique creature.

French comments on this in her statement in the novel when she portrays different

cultural bounderies and rules that limit all women's ambitions about finding their

unique identity. In this regard, French uses Mira's family restrictions to symbolize these different social bounds which deprive woman from different cultures to reach their identity, French states:

> In the Moslem countries, they make their women wear jubbah and yashmak. This makes them invisible… People don't see them, they are less differentiated than the dogs that run among the fruit carts. Only the forms are different here. You don't really see the woman standing at the glove or stocking counter, poking among cereal boxes, loading six steaks into her shopping cart. You see her clothes, her sprayed helmet of hair, and you stop taking her seriously. Her appearance proclaims her respectability, which is to say she's just like all other women who aren't whores. But maybe she is, you know. Distinction by dress isn't what it used to be. Women are capable of anything. It doesn't really matter. Wife or whore, women are the most scorned class in America. You may hate niggers and PRs and geeks, but you're a little frightened of them. Women don't get even the respect of fear. (ch. 1 ; sec. 4)

Indeed, Mira's quest for identity appears from the early ages of her childhood, she sought answers from everyone. She grew up asking her mother about words she did not understand or about the biological changes within her body but her mother never answered her. Though Mrs Ward urged her daughter to seek independendence, she kept her daughter with an incomplete picture of what a wowan is. The narrator narrates that once at home, Mira looked for answers in her parents faces, in the kitchen and around the dinner table, but unfortunately she could not satisfy her quest. She writes: "It was a tight, silent place; there was a little conversation at the dinner table. There were always tensions between her mother and father that she did not understand, and often tensions

between her mother and her, as well" (ch.1; sec. 5). Mira's parents are like the other people around her, exposed to the same chaining rules and patriarchial principles by which self-identification is meaningless for women. Mira's constant questions continue. Mira's quest grows with her as an embiguity accompanies everything around her including her girl friends' oddness behaviors at school, her fear of men's freedom and her parents' unhappy life.

French points out how Mira's concern about women's identity grows as she starts to wonder about her classmates' behaviors ; though she hates them and how they act, but her desire to find answers grows bigger as it is narrated:

One by one, they had started to lick their lips all the time to make them shiny, only to end up with chappedness around their mouth. They would pinch their cheeks to make them pink. And smoke in the girls' room, even though you got expelled from school for that. Girls who had been smart in sixth grade acted stupid in class in seventh and eighth. They walked in groups and talked in whispers and giggled. She couldn't even find anyone to walk to school with. But now she discovered that if she didn't want to act like them, she really wanted to know what it was they were whispering and giggling about. That her easy disdain for them should turn into a vulnerable curiosity outraged her. (ch. 1; sec. 6)

Dr. Hurriyet. Konur in *Marilyn French's Major Female Characters in The Women's Room and The Bleeding Heart* justifies "Mira is presented as a rebellious character, she refuses to act according the expectations of her family. Her mother wants her to have a good education in the future and to have a wealthy husband" (306). To illustrate this point further, the narrator observes: "Mrs Ward, convinced that Mira

was headed for great things – which meant a good marriage, to that good woman – scraped together money to send her for lessons" (ch. 1; sec. 5).

The rules imposed on Mira and all the women in her society limit Mira from achieving a full perception of her identity as a female. She represents the rebellious self that tries to break the chains imposed on her by her family and the people around her. French portrays how the patriarchal society deprives Mira as well as her mother from being who they really are; her mother is raised according to these rules and is doing her best to oblige Mira to grow as a typical American lady. The narrator comments on the relationship between Mira and her parents:

> She looked at her mother and saw bitter misery and resentment in her
> face; she saw sadness and disappointment in her father's. She herself felt
> wild clamorous emotions toward them both – love, hate, resentment, fury,
> and a crying ache for physical affection – but she never moved, never
> threw herself at either of them in either love or hate. The rules of the
> household forbade such behavior. She wondered if anyone at all was
> happy. She had more reason to be than most: she was treated well, fed
> well, clothed well, safe. But she was a screaming battlefield. (ch 1; sec. 5)

The narrator adds: "She needed only to look around her. There was brutality and cruelty everywhere: in the classroom, in the schoolyard in the block she lived on" (ch. 1; sec. 5). Mira cannot accept the rules enforced by the surroundings; she chooses instead to look for her own awareness and realization. Mira's uncertainty concerning such rules is described as follows: "And there were other things, things she could not put her finger on, that told her her parents" idea of being good and her own were not the same. She could not have said why, but her parents' idea of what she should do felt like someone strangling her, stifling her" (ch. 1; sec. 5). Mira is always wondering why

she is different; she refuses to be like the other children and girls whom she thinks are stupid and silly; she instead asks: "why do I have to be so sullen, so stubborn?" (ch. 1; sec. 5). The narrator comments:

> *She* would never be anybody's secretary, she would have her own adventures. She would never let anybody rescue her. She would never read the recipes and dress patterns, but only the news and the funnies. And no matter what went on in her head about boys, she would never let them know it. She would never lick her lips and pinch her cheeks and giggle and whisper like the other girls. She would never let a boy know she even looked at him. She would not let drop her suspicion that men were only grown-up boys who had learned some manners and were not to be trusted, being also members of the inferior gender. She would never marry, having seen enough in her parents' friends to warn her off that state. And she would never, never look like those women she had seen walking around with their bodies all popping out and deformed. Never. (ch. 1; sec. 6)

To portray the awfulness of girls' childhood during the 1950s and 1960s, French highlights young girls' fear of rape, sexuality, and virginity as a very problematic issue in the patriarchal realm and unveils all the false conceptions related. She also points out how rape affects girls' identity and leads them to accept marriage as their sole fate and only salvation from male's and patriarchal's social danger of rape. Thus, the fear of rape in the patriarchal society draws girls' dependent identity to men from their early ages as a way to eliminate the female identity and ingrain a new identity in girls' minds ans a way to limit their quest for any hopes in life since life is finite and restricted to men's accomplishments only. French, throughout Mira's childhood, comments on how was

acquiring a false information about rape, sexuality, and virginity which was presented to her from her mother's admonitions about the fear of pregnancy and misery life for any girl who loses her virginity and also from her neighbors' stories she used to see or hear about them as Mrs Ward says: "pregnancy led to marriage, to a marriage enforced on both, which meant poverty, resentment, animmediate baby, and 'a life like mine'" (ch. 1; sec. 9).

Finally, Mira understood that women's identity is related to the social vision to woman as her goal is traced about her capability to protect her virginity and herself from rape or not and that "She had no choice but to protect herself against a savage world she did not understand and by her gender alone was made unfit to deal with. There was marriage" (ch. 1 ; sec. 13). Mira's fear from rape continues to appear throughout her childhood as once when she heard the old ladies conversation about the girls' constant fear of rape wshen she said:

> They looked at her as if to include her in the conversation, as if she were one of theme. She had looked away, full of contempt for them. Who would want to rape them? Yet a few nights later there was an item in the newspaper about an eighty-year-old woman, raped and killed in her own apartment...and her mind went black with the horror, the blood, the desecration. It was not her virginity she treasured, but her right to herself, to her own mind and body. Horrible, horrible it would have been. (ch. 1 ; sec. 13)

The old women conversation about rape shows the sensibility of the fear of rape for all women. As Mrs Ward's caution to Mira about the fear of rape, the two old women tried to warn Mira, the child, about the jeopardy of rape. The two old women's admotion explains the shared fear all women experienced in the

patriarchal society as another form of abuse towards either young or adult women. It also clarifies the jeopardy of women's own identity as examplified in the previous quote as Mira clearly confessed her panic about being raped; she asserts that rape is not about sacred virginity which the society is concerned about instead, it is about the fear of losing the identity she is seeking for and the forfeiture of her 'self', 'mind', and 'body'.

Mira, as presented in the narrative, is totally different from the other girls mentally and psychologically (Akdogan 198). Generally, the basis of the feminist theory for Marilyn French is self-liberation, as an initial step towards identity realization (Blum 3-4). In the novel, the journey of the protagonist, Mira, is an endeavor to find herself. In her novel, French argues to Simon de Bouvoir's idea that a woman's identity is not determined by her biological or social factors, but, by the woman's attempt and struggles to construct and quest for her identity as Simone de Beauvoir notes: "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (2).

Even as a child, Mira insists on the idea that women must be aware of who they are and not how the society defines them. Her thirst for the truth pushes her to look for her identity in the other people's eyes and behaviors. The fact that she has grown up in a society that, praises men and degrades women, affected her present and future as well. In her childhood, Mira began to wonder about men's brutality and their wrath on women around her, her attitude towards the men in her society in the first place, which later on creates fear of men's freedom. The narrator at the early ages of Mira narrates how Mira feels fear from the boys she used to see on the motorcycles and their bodies

are as Mira claim "free". Mira doubts her own freedom and how those boys

differenciate alot from her own life. Thus Mira's quest of identity starts as she starts to

question everything around her and around her mother's female friends and girlfriiends

at the school. Mira, troughout her childhood, was afraid of the large extent of freedom

given to boys that makes her wondering who she is, what would she have been in this

world, and why she is not given that freedom as given for the boys. Mira's fear is

mainly concerned about sexual identity as a young girl, and her place within her

community.

Mira, the little child, becomes thirstier for her reality more than she was before;

her quest of identity grows with her as she grows in age. She reads books and searches

in each paper for answers to all her doubts and questions about women and men

relationship and more importantly about her identity. In the narrative, Marilyn presents

Mira during her childhood as a clever girl who seeks for knowledge unlike her

classmates and her mother's friends whom are only interested in 'man'. Thus, Mira

shifts to literature in which it represents her ultimate way to answer Mira's question of

'Who is she?' The narrator reveals: "She turned to litearture. She looked for books

about adolescents, books she could find herself and her problems in. There were

none"(ch. 1; sec. 7). Mira's long search for herself is purposeful that is why she never

surrenders and keeps her fight till she finds her answers. Thus, Mira finds herself caught

up in a trap of society's expectations of what a girl should be and act like, and her own

way of expressing herself.

Mira's constant quest for identity in her childhood affected her psychicly and

physicly which describes the intensive attempt of the central protagonist to attain her

goal and reveal the masked identity. The narrator describes Mira's restlessness and

struggle to find answers and identify herself as follows: "She was restless, could not

sleep or think, and would get up and kneel on her bed..."(ch. 1; sec. 6). French explains that Mira's restless mind and feelings prove that her dreams about independence and intellectual status would seem shallow and meaningless since the society implies women to be dependent on men and forces them to be only sex objects that ought to satisfy their selfish desires. She adds: "worst of all, she realized that her childhood notions, when she had read and adored Bach and Mozart and Beethoven and Shakspeare and Thomas E. Deway and thought that she would be like them, were somehow inappropriate" (ch. 1; sec. 6).

The narrator describes Mira's childhood and explains how she resisted and refused to behave like the other girls in the school and in the neighborhood. She is described as a clever child; the narrator states: "She was a bright child: she finished all the textbooks on the first day of school and, bored, spent the rest of the term enlivening her classmates. The solution decided upon was to move her ahead, into a class 'more on her level,' as the teacher put it" (French ch. 1; sec. 5). The portrayal of Mira's intelligence during her childhood in French's novel proves women's innate qualities before the suppress of the society and the social implications of erasing female capacities that define her identity.

Though Mira was moved to upper classes, she never could find the identity she quest for. She could not have the chance the find where to belong which describes the worldliness of the American society at the 1950s where Mira's goal was beyond all forms of sameness as she cared of her soul, intellectuality and all what answer her question 'Who am I ?' and exceed the social expectation. French comments : "She was moved ahead several times, but never found such a class. What she did find was classmates years older, inches taller, pounds heavier, and with a world of sophistication greater than hers. She could not talk to them, and retreated into novels she kept hidden

in her desk. She even read walking to and from school" (ch. 1; sec. 5). She adds : "But Mira had a private life. Being so much younger than herclassmates, she had no friends, but she did not seem to care. She spent all her time reading, drawing, daydreaming. She especially loved fairy tales and myths. Then she was sent for two years of religious instruction, and her concerns changed" (ch. 1; sec. 5).

Mira did not live her childhood as her peers instead she was obsessed with book which she used to look for them everywhere in the school library or take them as gifts from her mother and neighbor since they did not read or need them. She also preoccupied with what did not interest the other children, she never obeyed her mother's manners that she tried to teach them for her. Mira's childhood in French's novel is highly characterized with portraying Mira as a unique personality within the social community in New Jersey where the novel is set in. She sought knowledge when all the women, old or young, never cared for which shows the close relation of identity and intellectuality; it also shows that how Mira resisted the social norms of ignorance and obbedience to the existing rules and family and society expectations where everyone Mira knew was blindly committed to those rules and commands; French says:

> When Mira was fourteen, she had finished all the interesting books they
> would allow her to take from the library – they did not permit her into the
> adult section. So she leafed through the unappetizing family bookcase.
> The family itself had no notion what was in it: their books had collected
> themselves, being leavings from the attics of dead relatives. Mira found
> Paine's *Common Sense* and Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, as well as
> Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*, a book she read with complete
> incomprehension. (ch. 1 ; sec. 5)

Mira's childhood confusion and rebellion never stopped; her unanswered questions grew as the bitterness of the society got more complicated. Mira tried to find logical explanations, but nothing helped. During her childhood, Mira suffered from her deficiency to find answers. Her doubts grew as she thought about her past and her parents' treatment. The narrator says:

> One day, as she walked to the grocery store on an errand, she heard a boy screaming, and the thwack of a strap in the end house. Having been brought up with gentleness, Mira was horrified and wondered why a parent would do such a thing to a child. Had her parents done that to her, she would have been worse than she was, she knew that. She would have tried to defy them in any way she could. She would have hated them. But the terribleness of life existed even in her own home. (French ch. 1 ; sec. 5)

Mira confirms her quest for identity to prove herself, her choices, her rights, and her status toward family abuse. In the above quote, French portrays Mira in her childhood as a stubborn and rebellious character which decribes Mira's assertiveness to find answers for her question 'Who am I ?'. However, as Mira's unrevealed answers enlarged, she started to question herself and her uniqueness ; she wondered why whould the society banned her from being who she wanted to be, to express herself with no fear or even with no social restrictions of who she is and what she could be. The narrator comments: "She was bad, but she didn't want to be bad. Surely God must know that. She would be good if it didn't cost so much. And in her badness, she was not really bad. She only wanted to do what she wanted to do: was that so terrible? " (French ch. 1 ; sec. 5).

Mira's quest of identity continues however, as the society and family eradicated Mira and ignored her quest led Mira to feel the nonsense of herself and thus she turned to feel tired and slept for hours. It is pointed out in the novel "And she would never, never look like those women she had seen walking around with their bodies all popping out and deformed. Never" (ch. 1; sec. 6). Yet, as an adolecent girl, Mira finds herself acting the same like the other women and girls, those whom she hates at the first place. The narrator maintains that "She found some girlfriends; she even found herself whispering and giggling with them. She did not know how it happened"(ch. 1; sec. 7). The adventurous Mira and her dreams about independence and autonomy start to disappear due mainly to two factors ; first, as she, like any other American girl, lives under the same circumstances and experiences and the same violating rules and norms. In other words Mira's unconcious shift to act as all the girls in her age is mainly the result of the patriarchal society's confines imposed on all females. Second, Mira's identity loss during her adolescent can be related to her lonliness as all her classmates and parents refuse to help her and refuse to provide her with answers and consider her attempts to find herself as misbehaving. Thus, Mira's deviation led her to forget about her identity quest and become as all the other girls who go with the flow of the patriarchal system.

Mira's quest of identity during her childhood is bleak and ambitious at once as a frieze. It is packed with events that captures the limitations of the American society. Even as a young child, Mira succeeded to struggle the family restrictions and social expectations in New Jersey in 1950s though her quest for identity didn't mark concrete answers for her question 'who am I?'. Mira's quest of identity shows her endeavors to be what she whanted to be as an intellectual and intelligent girl and not as the society expected her to perfom; more than this, it asserts the parallel truth, that the social view

of women's identity from childhood to adulthood is infinitely nuanced as the social tradions and norms as well as the family rules take the whole responsability to determine the woman's female identity from her early ages. An antidote to the pain of the harsh oppression and restrictions Mira endured in her childhood, still as unbearabale a reality as ever, seems to lie in Mira's potentials to resist the social opression that deprived her to seek for what she aimed to reach. Her answers to 'WHo am I?' is still unclear due to the ingrained perceptions of women's identity in the people's minds, bones, and conducts.

II.3. Growing up in a Patriarchal Society

Society is an important factor in formulating one's identity. Social rules do not only control people's behaviours but also shape their way of thinking and personal feelings. The family plays a major role in how someone should be and how that person ought to act. Since childhood plays a significant period in one's life, it reflects the individual personality throughout a whole life. Through the main character in The *Women's Room*, Marilyn French comments on what it is like to grow up in a patriarchal society that gives priority to males over females. French stresses how the American society disdains women's efforts to express themselves and how it suppresses their identities.

In her novel, French shows sexist practices that affect women's endeavor for their identity and marginalize them from attaining their status in the society. *The Women's Room* highlights different experiences of female characters under male dominance in which Marilyn French portrays her female characters as victims of discrimination, violence, and patriarchy. Their stories reflect the constant pain and struggle of many American women who live under sexist oppression and domestic violence. In this vain, the narrator describes men's brutality and states: "She needed

only to look around her. There was brutality and cruelty everywhere: in the classroom, in the schoolyard in the block she lived on" (ch. 1; sec. 5). Mira struggles and resists the whole community, system, law, expectations and 'THEM' to construct a unique identity; All Mira's experiences and suffering go on the beneath of the quest of identity as her sole goal in which Mira seeks for freedom far from male supress asserting her identity and reviving herself with no chains of the patriarchal system.

French in, *The Women's Room*, presents men and women relationship in both, the domestic sphere and public sphere, as 'male-dominated relationship' in which males hold absolute freedom and women as morally and physically inferior to men. She asserts:

> Why was that? She began to realize that something was awry in the world. Her mother was dominant at home; in school, the authorities had all been women except for the principal. But it was not so in the outside world. The stories in the newspaper were always about men, except once in a while when a woman got murdered, and there was Eleanor Roosevelt, but everyone made fun of her. Only the page that gave recipes and dress patterns was for women. When she listened to the radio, the programs were all about men, or else about boys like Jack Armstrong, and she hated all of those and would not eat Wheaties when her mother bought them. Jack, Doc, and Reggie did the exciting things, and the women were always faithful secretaries in love with their bosses, or they were beautiful heiresses needing to be rescued. (ch.1; sec. 6)

Mira, who first says that she would have her own adventures, turns to be an identical female by the age of seventeen. She, like all the other women, shifts her interests unconsciously to boys and love relationships. Instead of her pursuit for inner

identity, she seeks to accomplish her sexual desires. In this concern, French writes: "Seventeenth was full of advice to girls about clothes, hair, makeup, and boys" (ch. 1; sec. 7). Mira ultimately discovers that her only answer to her quest is like the rest of American women, sex and the other gender; she confirms: "It was sex itself, Mira decided, that was humiliation. That was why she had such thoughts. Two years ago she had been her own person, her mind was her own, a clear clean space for the working out of clear, clean and interesting problems" (ch. 1; sec. 8). Although Mira cannot realize that ideal in herself, she finds it in sexual relationships; Mira's sexual identity has not entirely evolved, but it seems clear to the reader that she is driven to the same patriachal beliefs which impose on women's minds that sex is their solely purpose in life. She adds: "The main problem with sex, I'm convinced…is that it comes on us when we are already formed" (ch. 1; sec. 6).

At the end of her childhood, her boyfriend, Lanny, asks Mira for marriage though Mira thinks that Lanny is her perfect man whom she is in love with and her fairy love story like the fairy tales stories she likes to read, she refuses his offer "She saw her choice clearly as being between sex and independence, Since she always risked pregnancy, which meant dependence…Sex meant surrender to the male" (ch 1; sec. 10). Mira thinks that her marriage to Lanny will bury her for the rest of her life. She says : "Whenever she thought of marriage to Lanny, the picture that presented itself was of herself on her hands and knees scrubbing the kitchen floor, a baby crying in the next room, while Lanny was out carousing with the boys… she would become the oppressive, demanding wife – the ball and chain" (ch. 1; sec. 9).

The sexual segregation between Mira and Lanny supplements Mira's inner distress, angst and disintegration of her identity. Along with this, Mira seems to attempt to abandon Lanny's offer and all the structures of values that have shaped by society, by

others, in order to cling to her independence to define her reality. Marilyn French portrays the inner conflicts of her female characters between her sexual needs and love for Lanny and underlines her endeavor for individuality and quest for freedom from men's chain. French points out: "But she had no choice. She tried to tell herself that the life she wanted would someday be possible, that someday she would have it all, adventure and excitement and independence. But she also knew that such a life had, for her, to include sex, and there was no way she could reconcile that danger and those aspirations" (ch. 1; sec. 10). French's heroine, Mira, knows how she has been trapped into the misery she lives in and which is caused by her boyfriend Lanny, and how she can begin to live afresh but, the obstacle is 'Man'; thus, she decides to abandon her relationship with him where the narrator comments "Anyway, I understand Mira's hesitations.What she discovered suddenly was that she wanted to pick her own life" (ch. 1; sec. 9).

Mira reaches the conclusion that women's sexual relationship is the true identity of any girl and the only reason of existance for all females not only in America but in the world wide. French concludes "He had offered her marriage: what more could any woman want?" (ch. 1; sec. 10). Carolyn G. Heilbrun in *Marriage and Contempoarary Fiction* points that "Marriage, in fiction even more than in life, has been the woman's adventure, the object of her quest, her journey's end" (309). Sex, familly, men's obedience and subbordination, all these are chains that Mira received and got during her search for her true being and self value withing her childhood life.

Throughout the novel, the female characters share common life aspects from the part of their husbands, fathers or male friends in terms of exploitation and abuse and bad treatment in which the woman is never able to fulfill her desires or find her identity in life because she is considered as inferior creature and she is expected to offer

complete submission under male authority. For instance, once at home, Mira is always confused why there is silence in their house, she wonders why her parents do not communicate with each other around the table and in their meetings. She illustrates that her parents' house is very silent and cold; there is no conversation between Mr and Mrs Ward. And that there is only tensions and conflicts. French states:

> She looked at her mother and saw bitter misery and resentment in her face; she saw sadness and disappointment in her father's. She herself felt wild clamorous emotions toward them both – love, hate, resentment, fury, and a crying ache for physical affection – but she never moved, never threw herself at either of them in either love or hate. The rules of the household forbade such behavior. She wondered if anyone at all was happy. She had more reason to be than most: she was treated well, fed well, clothed well, safe. But she was a screaming battlefield. (ch. 1 ; sec. 5)

Thus, because of the misery and silence Mira's family suffers from and the way her parents treat each other, leads Mira to quest for a salvation from the misery and the life she, as well as her parents, are trapped in and pushes her to look for answers and motivates her to search for answer to her question, 'Who am I?'

French's work depicts well how society's unfair rules oppress women to the point of offering power and priority to men over women which enrages the protagonist and pushes her to resist and refuse what is called 'men's domination'. French clarifies: "Women see men as oppressors, as tyrants, as an enemy with superior strength to be outwitted. Men see women as underminers, slaves who rattle their chains threateningly" (ch. 1; sec. 23). However Mira doesn't know why she, as the other women in her

society, is living this unfair situation. Mira cannot blame herself and she views that every woman is a victim of these discriminated social norms.

According to Sherman et al., whatever the form of violence is, women are always victims of male's brutality and opression that suppresses and abuses women under patriarchal authority. Male supremacy and freedom given to man permits him to use cruel force and oppressive power to keep his domination over women psychologically, physically and sexually (141). The United Nation Organization (UN) defines violence against women as "The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (A/RES/48/104) defines violence against women as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"'" (The United Nation Organization). In French's novel, most women are identified as mad and insane because they refuse to obey men all the time which is presented in Mira's refuse to Lanny's will to make sex with her which causes her dillema in her school as well as with all friends she knows. Though Mira does't accept Lanny's offer, she is called a 'loose' by all her classmates and the students in the school; and though her reaction is not bad and she is protected from her fear of being pregnant, it gives her a bad reputation in her life. In this regard, French remarks that 'All women are victims by nature' (ch. 1, sec. 2).

As discussed in the first part of this chapter, Mira is in her search for identity, tries to identify herself and find her identity however due to the patriarchal norms. Mira fails to reach her goal as an independent woman; she fails to attain a self-realization about who she is. During her search, she faces multiple flaws and sentimental shocks which oblige her to surrender to the fact that it is hard to find and embrace one's true identity. In the novel, the narrator comments: "It was ridiculous to talk about injustice, it

was useless to protest..." (ch. 1; sec. 13). She knows very well that if she protests and refuses men's obedience, her efforts will always be regarded useless and illogical because she is ' a woman' and she is living in a society that praises men and opresses females' efforts. This society justifies men's violence and accepts rape in marriage in which women are driven lonely, hopeless, voiceless, and sometimes dead or mad. The narrator comments concerning this point: "Brutality was the way of life. Without it, the men felt like they were nothing, You know ?" (ch. 3; sec. 10). Most of French's female characters experience male's brutality either physically or psychologically.

In her childhood, Mira fought constantly for her quest of identity as she sought knowledge, resisted the ties of the family and rejected all stereotypical images taught for her by her society. As she grew, the American social restrictions grew with her; patriarchal abuse was extensively exercised on her for silencing her quest of identity. The sexist norms existing in her society swerved Mira from her purpose and her eager quest for identity as she found herself lost in the same traditional manners like all the other girls she knew. As the patriarchal society silences the female at a younger age and continues doing so as the girl grows up is an evident through Mira's journey. Mira's awareness of the patriarchal practices of the American society leads her to consider her goal as she has chosen to live without male dominance. However, Mira's quest never stops since she still views the brutality, oppression and abuse of males which according to, her, are the main reason behind women's ignorace and silly that erased their awareness.

Chapter Three: The Pursuit of Identity Quest in *The Women's Room*

In an article entitled" Marital Exits and Marital Expectations in Nineteenth Century America," Hendrik Hartog gives a set of definitions to the concept of marriage and its institution. He puts "Today, a marriage is commonly viewed as the private property of husbands and wives who mold their marriages to suit their purposes and identities"(96). As stated above, marriage is a strong bond of relation which is common between a man and a woman. This couple has shared interests and aims to achieve certain goals to preserve their properties as a family. Marriage is the sacred union that ties a man and woman in which the parents cooperate together in all domains to raise their children under the best life conditions. However, in a patriarchal family, man is supposed to act the role of the supreme authority in the house and women's role is binded within the domestic and sexual duty only.

After the first feminist wave to the present day, many feminist writes present marriage and divorce as the major concerns of the literary female debate in which it focuses on representing how these two factors play a significant role in either building or vanishing women's identity and self recognition. They agree on the point that the 'woman' is the most influenced in her journey to establish an independent identity in life because of the negative social and traditional influence of the family and the society. These social outlines bind woman's identity beneath the domestic and marital responsability. In this light, Marilyn French in her novel, *The Women's Room,* presents women who try to establish their own identity under the oppression of marital relationship and portrays their struggle to overcome the spectrum of identity crisis caused by men in the bounding system of patriarchy and gender based relations in marriage. The writer succeeds in presenting the recurring theme of marriage and its

effect on women's search for identity and belonging as same of divorce which later appears as the ultimate solution to escape men's domintation.

The third chapter will trace women's search for identity and will examine how married women lose their female identity as they devote their lives for marriage only. Furthermore, this chapter will deal with the theme of quest of identity during and after marriage, when they are wives and later divorced. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the theme of Mira's search for identity in her marital life. It further exemplifies the sexual and physical brutality of the husbands and how wives lose their identity as they reverence their domestic life and as they live to exalt their men's desires and their children needs. The second section in general scrutinizes the impact of divorce on women and their journey to discover their identity.

III.1. Marriage and the Female Identity in Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*

During the 1960s, 70s, women were completely separated from the world of men. While men were outside accomplishing their studies and occupying their jobs, women were tied at home playing the role imposed on them by the patriarchal society: 'housewives'. French comments: "It is, in a sense, a woman's first, last, and only choice. Marriage and a child make her totally dependent on the man, on whether he is rich or poor, responsible or not, where he chooses to live, what work he chooses to do" (ch. 1; sec. 12). This patriarchal system kept women dominated and subordinate as French puts it: "The women stayed home with the children, watched the sky to see whether to pull the laundry off the line before it rained, or whether they should turn on the lawn spray because it would not rain" (25). Hence, it is evident that the patriarchal society with its sexist norms and rules hinders women's advancement and molds their identities based on their gender.

According to Judith Kegan Gardiner "the word "identity" is paradoxical in itself, meaning both sameness and distinctiveness, and its contradictions proliferate when it is applied to women" (347). In Carolyn Heilbrun's book, *Reinventing Womanhood,* Heilbrun illustrates some stereotypical images about female identity. She argues that a women's success depends on male-identity whereas a woman's failure in life for any woman is when a "woman takes her identity from her man" rather than developping and constructing her own independent identity (347). She adds that women never form a self because they "need never undergo an identity crisis," yet they have an identity to lose: "the price of wifehood is abandonment of self" (103, 178).

It is not only society and male domination which causes women bondage, but also marriage which participates in erasing the woman identity, her self-recognition, and personal fulfillments in all public spheres. Strow Claudia and Brian Strow provide some statistics about women and divorce during the 20th century which explain how marriage binds married women ambitions in life and limits their aspirations; they state:

> In 1900, 43.5 percent of single women worked, while only 4.6 percent of married women worked. Overall, 75 percent of all working women were unmarried. At the turn of the century, culture dictated that married women be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. The few married women who tried to take on careers often found the balance of domestic duties and work to be precarious at best. "Marriage bars" existing from the end of the 19th century through the beginning of the 20th century kept many married women out of the labor force and caused numerous women to quit working at the time of marriage. (qtd. in Bomarito 9)

Before the 21st century, married women were absent in the life domains as work place and political meetings, their existence was merely viewed as a mean to satisfy the

sexual desires of males and as a machine to produce children. Whereas, men dominated and controlled all other public spheres outside home. In *The Women's Room*, the depicted married women are restricted to take care of the house only. Even the wives themeselves, they never think about any other concern outside the domestic and sexual domains in which they assume that it is their true identity which they were born for. The narrator in the novel comments: "The unspoken, unthought-about conditions that made it oppressive had long since been accepted by all of them: that they had not chosen but had been automatically slotted into their lives, and that they were never free to move" (ch. 2; sec. 4). French depicts the American life conditions for women where the patriarchal rules made jobs, education and other fulfillments only allowed for men. Furthermore, the prevalent patriarchal rulles obliged women to accept without any right of complaining about the life they were trapped in.

This idea is highlighted in French's novel, some women are proud to perform the proper woman in the patriarchal mold and reject any woman who does not. For instance, the narrator shares how Martha's failure (Mira's closest friend) in housework and how her failure in housework leads all the other women she knows to reject her because, according to themand the the patriarchal rules, she does not represent the typical woman's image in the American society. The narrator reveals:

> And any woman fails in her job as a housekeeper, she I remember Martha
> saying that she hadn't had a real mother; her mother did nothing in the
> way women were supposed to – she collected old newspapers and pieces
> of string and never dusted and took Martha to a cheap cafeteria to eat
> every night. So when Martha got married and tried to make friends with
> other couples, she didn't know how. She didn't know you were supposed
> to serve drinks and food. She just sat there with George, talking to them.

People always left early, they never came back, they never invited her.

(ch. 2; se. 4)

Since identity is the focus of most feminist writers, Marilyn French, in her work, seeks to explore how marriage and gender inequality in the patriarchal society deprives women from having a life and attaining an independent identity; she asserts: "She was a woman and that alone was enough to deprive her of freedom..." she adds: "Mira understood –what young woman does not? – that to choose a husband is to choose a life" (ch. 1; sec. 9). French affirms, for married women, marriage comes above all because it is the lost identity they have looked for. Moreover, the writer wants to shed light on how men succeed to defeat all females' attempts to rebell and attain an independent life far from all forms of male domination and brutality and how they bury all wives, sisters and daughters into the domestic life afforded to them as their sole goal and duty in life.

French's heroines, Mira, Margerit, Amelia and Grace are presented as examples of many other American women, who are engaged in marriage and who are expected to conduct a happy marriage with their husbands, however what Mira noticed in their faces and conversation revealed the awfulness of marriage as their whole concern was their children and husbands happiness rather than their own happiness. Mira remarked the selflessness of those women and how they were neglecting their own happiness which symbolizes how identity quest is lost in married women's life. Selflessness is reflected in Mira's marriage with Norm as Mira accepts to give up her studies, she works outside to help her husband, the medical student, and gives birth to her two children whom he never cares about and occupies her domestic misery life as a servant for her family as all women ought to do. In this context, the narrtor remarks that: "Her dream of choosing

and living a life of her own had vanished....Bitterness closed her in. She had lost her life; she would live out a half-life like the rest of women"(ch. 1; sec.13).

French affirms in her portrayal of the bitterness of marriage how Mira loses her identity, or her quest of identity, and her entire life. While she spends her long day hours in housechores and taking care of her two children, she forgets about her true identity as independent human being, she instead engages in the main stream of the shared belief that woman's only job is her children, husband and her house. In one of their discussions, Mira, Kyla and Val confer about women's identity loss and women's role as housekeepers by pointing out that:

> They don't. Not when you talk about women's greatness or women's
> constrictions: as soon as you say that, you're admitting an identity among
> all women, which implies lack of individuality. Kyla asked if Mira had
> been destroyed by her constrictions, and the answer is yes, or nearly so.
> Look!' she plunked her glass down on the table, 'my real point is that to
> tell women they're great because they've given themselves up is to tell
> them to go on doing it. (ch. 1; ch. 21)

Throughout the novel, the writer presents multiple scenes in which her female characters suffer from identity loss in their marriage "For all its activity, it was a lazy life because it went nowhere" (Ch2, sec 4). In this regard, the narrator explains how housewives perfom the role of the obedient servants:

> And perhaps inevitably, the equals they had married became servants. So
> when Bill had a cold one winter, he lay in bed bored and miserable, and
> called Bliss – she counted – twenty-three times to climb the stairs to bring
> him some tea, ginger ale, another aspirin, a magazine. Bliss caught his

cold, but he had to make a flight, so he insisted she get up and drive him

to the airport. (ch. 2; sec. 6)

In 1977, Julia Kristeva pointed out in her essay "Stabart Mater" that the virgin

Mary, who for centuries had been "the central icon of self-sacrificing motherhood, was

becoming less and less appropriate a model for women in the late twentieth century. In

"woman's time", Kristeva stresses that "motherhood is creation in its highest form, an

activity that entails being deeply attentive to a child, bonded to it in enveloping

gentleness and in a love that is forgettable of the self" (135).

In the novel, Mira describes the misery and the identity crisis, if not the loss of

identity, seen on the women Mira meets in the hospital during her delivery. These

women, Amelia, Grace and Margaret show how marriage and motherhood dismiss all

woman's qualities as independent individual, and provide her with one object in life

'family and child bearing'. According to the writer's portrayal of these mothers, these

women never view themselves as humans with personal desires and unique identities,

"But they never talked about themselves" (French ch.1; sec. 20). Rather, they finally

agree about the common belief of inequality and accept their inferiority and devote their

soul, life and efforts to their children. In this regard, the narrator comments:

> She looked at them with eyes blinded by sunlight and smiled, hearing
>
> Margaret worry again about whether her three-year-old was unhappy
>
> without her, and Amelia worrying about whether her mother was
>
> remembering to put fruit rather than candy in Jimmy's lunchbox, and
>
> Grace, silent and lined with her worries, hoping that Johnny had got his
>
> bike fixed, and that Stella was coping with the cooking. (ch.1; sec .21)

These mothers see that their sole concerns in life are their children. They idolize

their children and worship their husbands blindly "The women were simply not

interested in anything but children…they told each other that this was the most, no, the only important thing in life" (ch. 2; sec. 22). The narrator continues describing the mothers' loss in the maze of marriage and motherhood by nothing:

> She listened and she heard their acceptance, their love, their selflessness,
>
> and for the first time in her life, she thought that women were great… and
>
> accepting, they picked up the dropped stitches and finished knitting
>
> something warm for someone else, letting their own teeth rot and
>
> skimping on clothes to pay Johnny's dentist bill, laying aside their desire.
>
> (ch. 1; sec. 21)

The Women's Room provides an analysis and representation of the lives of many American wives who are rejected by society and keeps them isolated from. French writes about the daily activities women perform while men are outside. In this context, the narrator observes: "Aftrer Clark was born; she would take only babies and purse, and return for groceries and carriage. She was always anxious, fearing that either baby or babies would hurt themselves or that the carriage and groceries would be stolen while she was upstairs" (ch. 2; sec. 1). While Norm is outside focusing on his medical studies, Mira is home raising the children and feeding them. She plays with them and takes them outside for picnics and watches their first steps. Mira is regarded as a faithful wife that typifies other samples of the patriarchal agency who work hardly to gratify 'the family's needs'. Marilyn French captures Mira's identity in marriage with passivity too who is later on influenced by the imposed social customs and dependence to her husband egotism and selfishness.

In "The Women's Room: An experimental Mixed Media Production," Kizer Elizabeth affirms that Mira is a representation of domestic abuse like any other women mentioned in America ; she, as the other female characters, " ' is overcome by fate',

even though she has conformed and assumed the traditional wife and mother role prescribed for women of her generation"(ch. 1; sec. 7). According to Elizabeth, though Mira fought many times against female dependency to men before her marriage to Norm, with her decision of marriage, Mira lost her identity she sought to prove; she is no more presented as an independent girl who seeks to know who she is or to fight against the social norms she hated in her childhood. Mira is instead presented as weak and victim of the social patriarchal structures. The narraror relates:

> Well, anyway, if women do what is now conceived to be their natural and proper job and have any time or energy left over, they then have permission to do something else. But in fact if you've been brainwashed into selflessness, it wouldn't occur to you to do what you wanted to do, you wouldn't even think in such terms. There isn't enough you to want.
>
> (ch. 1; sec. 21)

In the quote above, French discusses the opression of marriage and how it transforms women from wise, conscious and intellectual persons to slaves of male servitude. As the events progress in the story, marriage is no more presented as women's salvation from rape ; instead, it apprears in the heroines' life as their only plight and misery in which they lose the only thing they deserve to live for 'themselves' or the recognition of their identity which reflects their uniqueness. Though Mira shows a complete obbedience in her marital relation in which she devotes her life and future for her husband and children throughout the novel, latter on, Mira appears as unsatisfied and unpleased woman where she shows her doubt about the purpose of marriage saying : "I thought about marriage and its laws, about fear of going out at night, fear of travelling, about the conspiracy among men to treat women as inconsequential – there are more ways to rape than one. Women are invisible, trivial, or demons, castrators; they are servants" (476).

Both men and women are human creatures, and what differentiates them from other creatures is the mind. Both of them have aspirations and yearn to accomplish them equally. As man work to have a successful proffessional life, woman follows her aspirations to establish herself. However, in a patriarchal society, this right is suppressed for women and ambitions are only permitted to men. Men can drive, own properties, travel and sign contracts whereas women are supposed to take care of the household, obey their husbands' orders, and willingly or unwillingly accept. They are obliged to keep silent and never complain because it is their natural duty. Thus, for a long time, women stayed far from the public arena which was supposed to include and give opportunity to man only.

Marriage requires women to appear as weak and subordinate to male institution and realm. Women have always acted according to what men wanted; in which they forget their dreams and future plans and disdain every woman who seeks self-recognition, all what they care about is what their husbands want and what pleases them. According to the patriarchal system, women must give all attention to their husbands' happiness and comfort therefore; they dismiss their quest for their own life behind. Moreover, when a woman dares to ask for her rights, she is seen as an outlaw wife who should be punished cruelly for showing disrespect and disobedience to her husband and society in general. For all these reasons, most women prefer to be silent and be committed to their housechores the housechores. Though Mira firstly accepts her oppressed marital life with Norm, but later, it becomes her source of suffering. Her marriage with him turns to be a prison in which Mira is imprisoned and tied by the shackles of marital patriarchal beliefs and consequently, she loses the purpose of her individuality. Mira finds that the life she left behind her in her childhood worths more than the reason why she accepts to marry Norm for, she recognizes her lost identity and

all the ambitions she sought to realize in her childhood. In this context, French discusses this idea at length in her novel in which the narrator explains:

> There were things going on in the world while Mira was caring for her children. Eisenhower had been elected; Joseph McCarthy was having some trouble with the United States Army. But the most striking event in Mira's life apart from the children occurred one day when she was down on her hands and knees scrubbing the kitchen floor, and one of the babies began to cry, and Norm was out – at the hospital, sleeping at his mother's, somewhere. And she sat back on her heels, shaking her head up and down, half smiling, half grimacing, remembering her fears of marrying Lanny. It had all happened anyhow. Oedipus couldn't escape his fate, and neither could she. The scenario had been written before she was even born. (ch. 1; sec, 21)

Şule Akdoğan in the article "*The Women's Room*, Consciousness Raising and the Confessional Mode" argues that, through the structure of relations between the women and their husbands, the texts draws attention to the fact that these women do not question their submissive status; hence, the longer they keep silent, the more oppressed they become (200). The narrator describes wives' satifaction with their dreadful marriage as a symbol of the great impact on the patriarchal norms on females' minds; the narrator states:

> The unspoken, unthought-about conditions that made it oppressive had long since been accepted by all of them: that they had not chosen but had been automatically slotted into their lives, and that they were never free to move (the children were much more effective as clogs than confinement

on a prison farm would be). Having accepted the shit and string beans,

they were content. (French 77-8)

As a matter of fact, in a patriarchal system, wives have no control over themselves and they are perceived to be nothing more than a property in the hands of their husbands. In her work, French focuses primarily on the portrayal of women's selflessness, she describes many of her female characters as passive humans who share no interest in life but, in the household boundries, which limits their hopes in life and seizes their identity like Mira, Sandra, Bliss, Adele, and Samantha. Whereas men have different interests which reflect their minds, hopes, dreams and identity. In her novel, French presents how men have different ambitions in life in comparison to women whom their only concern is bound under domestic life ; she argues:

> For the men, of course, were experiencing life on a different level. Hamp
>
> flew around the country for his company, so he went first class and ate at
>
> expensive restaurants and was fawned over by stewardesses and waiters;
>
> Bill was a navigator for an airline and flew all over the world, staying at
>
> expensive hotels and resorts, eating at fancy restaurants, fawned over by
>
> stewardesses and waiters. And even Norm and Paul had a good share of
>
> expensive lunches out, 'company' dinners, and fawning over by nurses
>
> and secretaries. They brought their demands home; they began to see
>
> home and the women in them as provincial, small-minded, shabby. (ch. 1;
>
> sec. 6)

She adds : 'none of the men is wrecked...But the others all have pretty good jobs, some are remarried, all of them live, to varying degrees, what is called the good life" (ch. 3; sec.15). In other words, through the four wives' life, French provides her readers with a real account on the fact that wives suffered a lot from

loneliness in order to preserve their marriage. Wives taste the prison life at home while husbands are outside having company dinners with friends and their female secretaries.

The narrative, thus, shows that in real life "marriage is only a legalization of the already existing patriarchal oppression" (Akdogan 199). Unlike the other women in the suburban Mira shows a shift in her identity development even in her marriage thus, she starts to develop her self-awareness through reading. "The Women's Room: Women and the Confessional Mode," Susannah Radstone affirms Mira's awareness against the bad marital conditions she lives by stating:

> As Mira's feminist consciousness develops, so she is increasingly marked
> out as different from the other women by the authoritative narrator. Mira's
> friends no longer feel comfortable associating with her: 'Mira had been
> reading philosophy when Adele came in ... She was uncomfortable and
> decided she would not go to Mira's again'. As Mira becomes increasingly
> different from the other women, so the central protagonist takes over
> more frequently from authoritative narration and the point of view that the
> reader is thus invited to share becomes increasingly authoritative and
> knowing. (145)

Identity is claimed to be the unrevealed truth for all women in any patriarchal society (Ebert 891). Since knowledge plays a fundamental factor in constructing one's identity, identity cannot be achieved without reading or at least without a quest for identity recognition. But, in a patriarchal society, brains are washed. It is considered as abnormal for any girl to read or to seek for educational fulfillments. Furthermore, education is viewed as a waste of time like when Adele asks Bliss about what is her son Cheryl's grade, Bliss says that she does not even know and that according to his report

card he is supposed to be in third grade. Then, Bliss awakens Mira's mind when she tells the wives that schools are meaningless, and children do not learn anything in schools. Bliss adds that all schools are a waste of time and she sends her children there only to evict them to not bother her at home. The narrator: "Don't you worry about them missing school so often?' Adele's voice had a brittle edge. 'No,' Bliss shrugged. 'They don't learn anything anyway.' She stirred sugar into her coffee. 'I wouldn't send them at all – they learn more from TV – but I want to get them out of the house" (ch. 2; sec. 12).

Moreover, identity loss appears in the wives' ignorance as the wives depend on their husbands' accomplishments and careers and never tend to appear as intellectual individuals who have a status in society that reflects their identity. When Adele notices Mira reading, Adel and the other wives whisper about her, and all the wives consider her habit of reading as a mental problem and a sign of madness ; and they conclude that Mira is certainly unhappy in her life as it is stated: "Adele said, 'Sometimes I think Mira's neurotic, you know? I mean, why would she read those fancy books? As if she were trying to show off.' And bliss said: She's always talking about women's rights.' 'I don't think she's happy staying at home.'Adele looked shocked. 'What does she expect? She has kids. She is neurotic. Sometimes I pray for her at night" (ch. 1; sec. 2). In this context, French elaborates further on this idea throughout her novel. French questions the inequality between women and men as women work as much as men though they are still perceived unworthy in the society. French discusses this idea in relationship to Woolf's idea when she points out:

> And Woolf did know that, even if she didn't think they belonged in
>
> literature. After all, she was the one who asked: Why have women no
>
> money? Haven't they, throughout time, worked as hard as men, labored in

vineyard and kitchen, in field and house? How is it the men ended up with

all the pounds and pence? Why do women not have a room of their own,

when in her day, at least, every gentleman had his study? (ch. 1; sec. 4)

In the novel, marriage plays a major role in Mira's life and for the other female

characters like, Bliss, Adele and Natalie in which it is considered as a source of power

and protection for women, though it is ironic for the writer herself. Nevertheless, the

group of the housewives shows a change of the personal consciousness of the identity of

women since they discover new part of themeselves in their coktail parties (Radstone

144). The narrator explains this by: "They began dimly to realize that they had another

self from the one they lived with daily. It was a kind of miracle. It seemed as if they

might have another chance, could live out a life different from the one they had. What

kind of life it was they didn't know" (ch. 3; sec. 7).

At the beginning of the story, the author insists on the fact that marriage and a

wife-husband relationship would save the life of many women who find relief in this

sacred relationship from the threats and fears of rape, and more precisely, from men

themeselves. But, in practice, marriage is presented as the death of women's quest for

independence and autonomy it causes their bitter lonliness: "But in fact, Norm was not

around Mira to protect her against men. She did herself, by looking herself in, by not

looking at them or thinking about them. She could do this because she was a married

woman"(ch. 3; sec. 3). Marriage which is seen as a refuge for these hopeless and

powerless women turns to be an asylum to the many unwanted and divorced females

and leads them to insanity and, in other times, to death like Mira who considered

committing suicide after her marriage fails and when Norm files for divorce.

As shown in the preceeding examples, women in the patriarchial society share

the same anguish, misery and pain. They have experienced similar humilliating

conditions and tiring housework. They took care of children and husbands. They cleaned and washed. They cooked and prepared dishes before their husbands arrive home. At the same time women who swallowed the pain never showed rebell or dissatisfaction toward their men or their children as a symbol of women's vanished identity. In their marriage, these women witness all forms of abuse and brutality and they cannot find relief only when they are with each other; as Mira admits:

> Wrecked, wrecked. All survivors, all of us. We survived the battlefield of our own lives, and the only help we got came from each other. It was Alice who sat night after night with Samantha until she got over the hysteria, the sense of betrayal, the awful hurting hate. It was Martha who came and found Mira lying on the floor with her wrists slit. It was Mira who put Martha to bed and got rid of the rest of the sleeping pills and sat with her as she realized that she would live. No one could save Lily, though. She was beyond us. (ch. 3; sec. 9)

The Feminine Mystique (1963), by Betty Friedan, is considered as an appeal to the capabilities of women outside their houses, and to awaken them to the source of inferiority and lonliness, which Friedan calls "The problem that has no name". Through the book, Friedan calls against the mainstream of domestic life and provides a collection of women's shared experiences to describe how women were afraid or uncomfortable to admit that they were not happy with their life, a life which has been designed by gender beliefs basing on stereotypes that push women to occupy compliant roles, and serve 'the men'. More than that, marriage causes women's neurosis problems and low self-esteem in which women doubt their own identity if they are good enough as housewives or not, this pression sometimes leads to women's insanity. To illustrate, Mira confesses :

"So I went out and bought The Ladies' Home Journal and Good Housekeeping. I did it for years religiously. I read them like the Bible, trying to find out how to be a woman" (ch. 1; sec. 4). She adds : I always took the psychological quizzes in the magazines: are you a good wife? a good mother? Are you keeping the romance in your marriage? (ch. 1; sec. 5). In other words, women had severe psychological problems within their marriage due to oppression they confront and the carelessness and loneliness they feel in this relation.

Every human is born free. Both male and female are created with equal rights. During the slavery era, slaves were treated as commodities; they were sold, whipped and whites took their freedom. After slavery, people were freed. However, one class of creatures could not escape the holocaust of being one's property. In marital relations, and more precisely, in patriarchal gender relations, men replace the white masters and women represent slaves. In this quelling relationship, women are the ones who suffer from the reality that their own husbands treat them as slaves not as free human beings who have the complete freedom to enjoy their independence. Clearly, throughout the novel, Mira, Sandra, Bliss and the other female characters are presented as victims and prisonners for their husbands' marital jail.

Norm shows Mira a shared respect during their marriage, but at the same time, he views her as one of his possessions who is obliged to feed him, clean his clothes and iron them, scrubb the flour of his house, support him financially and fulfill his sexual desires. Accordingly, even Mira is presented as one of his own properties. However, when Mira discovers that she is a property, "she paced through her responsibilities, moving toward some goal she could not discern. 'The word *freedom* had dropped from her vocabulary; the word *maturity* replaced it. And dimly she sensed that maturity was knowing how to survive. She was as lonely as ever" (ch. 1; sec. 14). Such realization

triggers the beginning of the change that Mira seeks; what she feared the most happened to her, she does not know who she is anymore and becomes a subordinate to a man. Thus, the narrator points out: "But the most striking event in Mira's life apart from the children occured one day when she was down on her hands and knees scrubbling the kitchen floor, and one of the babies began to cry, and Norm was out, at the hospital, sleeping at his mother's house, somewhere"(ch. 4; sec. 2). Mira recognizes that marriage is a cage and penalization rather than an honor. At this turning point, one understands that she denies all the principles of marriage she knows on the behalf of all American women, in Marilyn's novel and in the real life, who experience a patriarchal marriage. It is apparent that Mira finally refuses to be treated as a property, but as a human being, her refusal to be possessed by a man reflects her desire to continue her search for identity.

III.2. Divorce and Female Identity in Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*

During the second wave of feminism, feminists' activism contributed to the growing trend of divorce in the United States. By spreading variety of ways publicly, literary or through the media, feminists encouraged divorce within women who couldn't accommodate between their marriage and their individuality. Their success in liberalizing divorce laws to provide options for unhappy or abused women opened the way for thoses ex-housewives to impose their existence in the Amerian society and to break all laws that encourage men's supremacy over women. The feminist plea that marriage is a form of oppression, as marriage at that time meant role gender segregation, led to the quest of divorce, yet to the persuit for independent identity. However, the increasing divorce cases in the 19th century released many opressed women from the spectrum of men's segregation, and at the same time paved the way for a new form of women's disorder and identity crisis in America.

If marriage is foregrounded to a great degree of suffering by Marilyn French in her work, *The Women's Room*, the main stream of divorce is presented with greater degree. Suffering characterizes much of the experiences of the central protagonist, Mira, and all the women depicted in the novel. Moreover, while divorce generally suggests that greater self knowledge may well lead to a lessening, though not an end, to suffering, which appears in most of the characters' life after marriage, *The Women's Room* leaves its readers with the sense that life will continue to be excruciatingly painful for most of French's female characters which may cause them even insanity, or death.

Notably, divorce affects various areas of one's life for both, the man and woman; its consequences can be lived on a long or temporary term and depend on personal identities of the couple. Divorced women experience more dreadful emotional distress and more negative acceptance of themselves than divorced men. According to Clarke-Stewart, Brentano and Hooyman, "Divorce brings a period of time marked by stress, instability, vulnerability, feelings of loneliness and distress related to identity, self-confidence...and untimely death"(Klobučar 91-4). Some scholars like Williams and Dunne-Bryant in their studies assume that "women experience more negative effects" (Klobučar 94). Moreover, It is noted that women who occupy domestic life and who have little or no experience in work spheres, "post-divorce period is typically more difficult" for them. For these women, divorce is the most painful experience they may encounter in their life as they experience the end of their relation with their husbands as the loss of an ideal family, dreams and expectations about the permanence of marriage in which they had to end the only significant part of their life" (Klobučar 89-99).

Carolyn Heilbrun clearly underlines the cost of either having an independent identity or husband-dependent identity because this later may lead the woman to

identity crisis in which she finds herself suffering from the spectrum of loneliness and in other cases insanity. This is the case of the central protagonist, Mira, in French's work *The Women's Room,* in which Mira suffers from the trauma of divorce and male abandoning in her both relationships with Norm and later with Ben ; as it is stated : "If Mira wanted the independent life, she would have to give up being sexual. This situation was a terrible incarnation of her masochistic fantasies. Women were indeed victims by nature" (French 29).

In *The Women's Room*, divorce is presented as only an other way to make the woman suffers "Therefore, the novel assiduously makes women central and relates the unjust acculturation of gender roles in which women are dominated by men" (Akdogan 195). Hence, French does not present divorce as the best solution for oppressed women in the narrative and in the American society, rather she discusses the trauma of divorce in its internal traumatised dimensions as loneliness, insanity, mental and psychological breakdowns and death. Unlike Val who finds her freedom far from men and Iso who abandons all male relations after being raped by her fiancee and becomes a lesbian, Mira tries to commit suicide after Norm's demand for divorce. Later on, after she survives the divorce and has had a relationship with Ben, Mira has a mental breakdown after she hears that Ben got married and has two children from his secretary assistant. Later, Martha follows her friend Mira's attempt to die too when she tries to commit suicide as George, her lover, confesses that his wife is pregnant with his child and decides to break up with her to protect his family.

Suicide comes to these women as a way to escape from their as George, her lover, confesses that his wife is pregnant with his child and decides to break up with her to protect his family. Mira thinks that "it was less a new beginning" "than a

continuation" because "[a]lthough the external events of her life changed, the internal ones remained much the same" (ch. 2; sec. 7).

According to Heinz Lichtenstein, stable society depends generally on the stable identities of its individuals. But, when the cultural background of people of different races and genders and ages fails to fit the expected identity roles of the originated paradigm, the unidentical persons of the same gender or the same age may suffer from identity crises. Thus, though everyone has an invariant identity which is built accoring to the societal framework, it is nonetheless potentially weak and may be exposed to an acute trauma: "loss of identity is a specifically human danger, and maintenance of identity a specifically human necessity" (77).

In *The Women's Room*, through Mira's divorce, French affirms Lichtenstein's philosophy of identity crisis. When Norm files for divorce, which foregrounded Mira' suffering as much as in her marriage. For Mira, Martha and Kyla as for the most of the other female characters, happiness and stability implies behind a caring man who loves his wife in return and accepts her dignity as a woman, her interests and satisfy her needs "men are central to women's lives" (French xiv). But, throughout her marriage, Mira has worked hard for all the fifteen years to be the perfect mother and housewife. Eventhough she has been confused and skeptical about the whole 'housewife' role and who she is and what she truly wants to be and do, Mira has fulfilled all her responsibilities as a wife and a mother. After marriage, Mira's trauma increases. She suffers from the fact that though she does all what the society and norms recommend, she fails in having her husband by her side.

The narrator describes how does it feel to be a divorced for Mira: "Their separation and divorce did not feel like good freedom to her, it felt more like being thrown out of the igloo in the middle of a snowstorm. There is lots of space to wander

in, but it's all cold' (ch. 4; sec. 1). After her separation, Mira feels empty and lost. She cannot handle the loneliness after Norm's desertion so, she commits suicide. Kate Marantz clarifies the consequences of the trauma of divorce and she states: "At the same time, that room often feels empty or interminably stretched out is central to the uncertainty, even malaise, about the consequences of breaking out of gendered constraints"(149). Thus, Mira loses the only identity she knows for all her life imposed by society that glorifies men at the expense of women's efforts and feelings: "you could break society' s rules, and you might even get away with it, but such success, what return? Forever and forever you would be alone" (ch. 1; sec. 13). Through the novel, French continues to depict the bitter experience of women after marriage when she presents an example of all women who live the cruelty of their husbands but at the same time their dependence over their husbands affetcs their life after divorce. To illustrate, Mira narrates:

> I wanted a divorce, that's why I'm here. I wanted a divorce, but then
> when he walked out of the house I ran after him, I ran all the way down
> the street screaming for him, trying to hold on to his jacket. I couldn't be
> alone, I didn't know how to do things. How could I do it? Pay bills. I've
> never paid a bill in my life. and I just sat there and cried. I thought I'd be
> living in the dark. I cried and I begged him to come back, the Nazi, the
> martinet, and I kept trying to get him to act human. (ch. 4; sec. 5)

French represents Mira as a character who experiences offensive and tiring situations in her marriage; yet Norm asks for divorce, the plight gets more worst. The writer's novel does not present Mira's increasing awareness of gender roles and oppressive mechanisms of patriarchy only after Norm's demand for divorce. Even Mira, who has been struggling for more than fifteen years in the marital abuse and silence to

present the picture of the proper housewife, does not withstand against her husband's discouragements. She could not ignore his absence from home deciding to start an independent life and focuses on her individual life only after their divorce and only after her attempt to give up her marriage and ignore her fear of the social expectations of the single mother. Only after recovering from her first reactions of divorce, drinking heavily and attempting suicide, Martha encourages Mira to go back to university. Consequenty, Mira experiences consciousness-raising which moves her to seek her own aspirations at that time of her life (Akdoğan 198). Mira states: "I look back to my own life and all I see is bombed-out terrain, full of craters and overturned rocks and mudholes. I feel like a survivor who has lost everything but her life, who wanders around inside a skinny shriveled body, collecting dandelion greens and muttering to herself" (ch. 3; sec. 19).

Once Mira is scrubbing the floor, she remembers her childhood aspirations and her rebelious identity against her childhood lover Lanny. Mira notes how she loses her dream to achieve a successful academic career and how many other women like Bliss, Sandra, and Adele whose lives are continually oppressed by their husbands as much as she does. Starting from this platform, Mira wonders about the reality of marriage and questions the reasons to accept living at the mercy of an unjust husband. Ultimately, Mira's raising consciousness appears after she gets divorced . She is thrust into a new sense of freedom that, in actual fact, feels a lot like loneliness. One of the most memorable quotes is when Val and Mira are talking about this:

> 'I gather you're lonely,' Val smiled at her. 'But weren't you often lonely
> when you were married? And isn't it nice to be alone sometimes? And
> sometimes when you are alone, aren't you feeling sad mostly because
> society tells you you're not supposed to be alone? And you imagine

someone being there and understanding every motion of your heart and mind. When if someone were there he – or even she – wouldn't necessarily be doing that at all? And that's even worse. When somebody is there and not there at the same time'. (French ch. 4; sec. 10)

This incident prompts her to review her thoughts as she wonders how she herself idolized Norm, the man, like the patriarchal society dictated: "The Great God Norm: was it true she quoted him like a god? She could remember when she thought him less intelligent than herself. What had happened? He had moved from frightened boy to authoritative man, but she knew he was still as hallow as ever" (ch. 3; sec. 13).

Hendrik A. Hartog defines divorce as the following "divorce is understood to be the usual remedy for marital unhapiness, as well as for breaches of marotal rights. What happens at the time of divorce is thought to explain what did or did not happen during the marriage"(114). For most females in *The Women's Room*, divorce is a mental and sentimental shock as it was the opposite for some others like Mira who later finds relief in getting rid of her oppressive reluctant husband, and Val a divorced woman who is a political activist and takes care of her teenage daughter, Chris. This formulation between Val and Chris indicate that "Female identity formation is dependent on the mother-daughter bond" (Cardiner 349). These divorced women appear as independent individuals as their divorce draws a path for them to find themselves and devise new opportunities to complete their educational and academic careers.

In her quest for stability, Mira meets a group of women Val, Ava, Clarissa, Chris, Iso, Kyla who suffer from the same ordeals, men's shadow. These women aim to overcome the oppression of society. In this context, Linda M. Blum asserts the women's debate in the American society which is reflected in French's work: "We are most often presented with images that tend to depict sexism or gender asymmetry as an individual

problem, lingering from the past, a problem of faulty socialization or lack of adequate role models, a problem which can be easily overcome" (3). Sexual differences, gendered ideologies and social conventions are the core of their long conversations. They exemplify their hate to man and spread their ideas and and hate twords rapists and promote female identity autonomy and tackle women's oppression as a political issue in which Val sees that "heterosexual relationships are based on the selflessness of women mainly because women perform what is regarded as their natural job; giving priority to domestic duties they ignore their individual aspirations" (Blum 1). Therefore, Val thinks, women are "brainwashed into selflessness" (French ch. 1; sec. 21). In "This Novel Changes Lives: *The Women's Room,* Consciousness-Raising and the Confessional Mode," Şule Akdoğan explains: " the group finally agrees that both sexes should perform selflessness … They also accept that it is only a "rhetorical solution" since in real life it would not work" (201).

 Mira's new beginning makes her feel more special as she meets those women who share her life experience either in marriage or as a rebellious female who quests for her identity. The narrator reveals in this regard:

> Mira started back to school, extremely nervous, taking only two courses,
> unsure of how she would be able to manage after all these years. But there
> was a whole group of them at the local university, middle-aged women
> back at school. She was astonished to find them and they to find each
> other. All had the same trepidations, all had domestic concerns. Mira was
> not alone. Her courses seemed amazingly easy, and she did three times
> the work necessary, not out of anxiety but from interest. She had the time.
> She had plenty of time. (ch. 4; Sec. 2)

For Mira, education is the last resort to shelter from her collapse caused by both her failed marriage of male-selfishness and the sudden divorce. French writes "Val smiled. ' I think of cambridge as home for the homeless'" (ch. 4; Sec. 9). Mira thus becomes a woman who is aware now of her identity through which she escapes the patriarchal oppressive relationship and accepts Norm's divorce decision wihout hesitation. She realizes that she has lost her selfhood when she was with Norm.

From the course of events starting from her childhood, it is clear from the beginning that Mira would not be subjected to the inevitable reality. Norm has always been selfish and translated that when he leaft Mira in the halfway despite of all the sacrifices she offered him which were on the expense of her freedom. Such realization is depicted in the novel as: " Mira was thrust into freedom just as she had been chuted into slavery...., but she agreed to the divorce and submitted a bitter bill, totting up the cost of her services for fifteen years" (ch. 4; sec.1). In this frame, her subsequent decision to go back to college represents the initial step towards her independence and towards a new womanhood. Since then onwards, she decidedly reconsiders her life and concentrates on what she aspires to be in life: a free woman with big ambitions.

In this response, university and education present the sole refuge to these women to rebuild themselves. Out from male dominance, these married, divorced and single women find sisterhood and support each other by discussing their common sorrows as the best way to accomplish their happiness far from male-relations. Kate Marantz underlines the strength of sisterhood and its significant role in developing the female identity by arguing : "She and a group of other female students forge intellectuality stimulating and emotionally

fulfilling bonds, gathering regularly in their apartment to engage in the kinds of productive debate and cathartic venting becoming commonly known as " conscious raising" (146).

Nancy J. Chodorow in her book, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, portrays female personality as "relational and fluidly defined, starting with infancy and continuing throughout womanhood" (6-7). Her argument confirms the sociological and historical dimensions of the female identity far from the biological factors, and she does not see female personality formation as a predetermined progress. She believes that female identity is a developed process thus, their identity depends highly on the changes women encounter during their life. Thus, female identity is pictured as "typically less fixed, less unitary, and more flexible than male individuality, both in its primary core and in the entire maturational complex developed from this core. These traits have far-reaching consequences for the distinctive nature of writing by women" (Gardiner 352-4).

With time, Mira's life begins to change. Mira returns to study to recover from her lost identity. Having an educated and ambitious personality makes her journey to find herself easy. She feels now that her divorce from Norm opens her doors for new rooms. The narrator describes: "That had been another world, a world dictated by Norm. Everything seemed different now. She did as she pleased. She cleaned only when it was necessary, she wore old clothes around the house. Meals were simple and relaxed and suited to the boys' taste. In time, as calmness was restored around them, they spent more time at home, and sometimes they even sat down near Mira and started a conversation" (ch. 4; sec. 2). Mira stopped acting as the society recommends.

However, Mira's feeling of relief is threatened, as she remembers her loneliness thus the trauma is back again to her life till she moves to Cambridge and meets Ben

whose relationship with Mira brings her to her ecstasy in which she finally reach her satisfaction of who she is as Ben respects Mira's choices in life and shares with her the same interests and goals. Mira's relationship with Ben is different in which Mira experiences a sexual awakening and she is saved from the traumatic aftermath of her divorce. French interprets happiness and freedom in Mira's and Ben's relation in which the couple shows complete satisfaction and stability together without the restriction of the so called 'marriage'; the narrator states : "Mira was working very well: the sense of home she had in her relation with Ben freed her mind. She could focus intensely for hours without feeling restless or getting up to pace her apartment or the top floor of Widener. She could be as organized and efficient as she had always been without having to feel she was substituting order for life" (ch. 5; sec. 1).

Mira's new relationship with Ben offers her happiness and gives her the possibility to realize herself out from the patriarchal oppression. Linda M. Blum discusses this point and asserts : "Mira and Ben symbolize the attempt to form equal relationships, relationships characterized by intimacy and freedom, allowing independence for each as an individual while providing the security of a deep mutual commitment to the relationship"(9). To illustrate from the novel, such peaceful relationship between Mira and Ben is described as:

> If anyone ever had a chance for a good mutual life, it was Mira and Ben.
> They had enough intelligence, experience, goodwill, and enough room in
> the world- whether you call that opportunity or privilege- to figure out
> what they wanted and to achieve it. So what happened in their
> relationship ought to be paradigmatic somehow. It seemed so at the time.
> It seemed to glow with the divinity of the ideal. They had the secret,

keeping both intimacy, and spontaneity, security and freedom. And they

were able, somehow, to keep it up. (ch. 5; sec. 1)

But, as Ben asks Mira to marry him and confesses his will to have a child, the trauma hits Mira's life again and their relation falls apart: "Mira and Ben engaged in a real struggle over whose needs would be met in the relationship" (Blum 10) as Mira wants to carry on her dissertation in Cambridge and becomes a teacher, and Ben chooses to travel to Africa to finish his dissertation. Ultimately, the couple breaks up when Mira tells Ben that she does not wish to have children anymore because she does not want to suffer because of housechores and childrenbearing as she was in her relation with her ex-husband Ben. Mira suffers once more from the loneliness and as she hears about Ben's marriage with his secretary at Linieu and his two children, Mira's life gets worst which traps her to madness. Blum comments: "If their relationship is, as Marilyn French writes, paradigmatic a vision of what could be, what meaning can we garner from such an ending? What does this mean about our collective visions and truths?" (10).

Before leaving to Africa, Ben talks to Mira about their plan in Linieu and how amazing their live will be there with their future child; Ben talks with excitment about Mira's life with him in Africa and how he arranges that she can finish her dissertation with him there and her possibility to work there as a teacher or a translator. Mira is outraged by his insensitivity to her needs, and by his unacceptable behaviour as he decides her life instead of her without even asking her about her own decisions, which captures Ben as any other traditional gender role who controls his woman's life as if she is his own property. Though Ben tries to convince Mira to leave with him because he loves her and cannot live without her, Mira feels that Ben is controlling her life and eradicates her identity same as Norm used to do and she tells him that she has no desire

to have additional children. Thus, she chooses to finish her research in Cambridge. Blum comments on Mira's and Ben's dispute: "she was gravely affronted by Ben's presumption that she subordinate her work to his career needs. Moreover, Mira felt that Ben was willing to "eradicate" her as an individual in order to obtain his desires" (10). The narrator recounts: 'She felt that he had eradicated her. He was annoyed that she did not understand her powerlessness. How had it happened, that he had all the power?' (663). Mira confronts Ben :

> You wanted to go, and it would hurt you to go without me, and so you simply assumed I would go with you because that was the simplest solution to the problem. And you never, never once", she rose and her voice rose, "never thought about me! About my needs, my life, my desires! You eradicated me, me as a person apart from you, as successfully as Norm did! (ch. 5; sec. 21)

Mira thinks that Ben assumes his career is taking precedence and priority over her dreams and desires. Thus, in the novel, French clarifies clearly that Mira unlike her relationship with Norm, she appears more independent and aware of her personal aspirations and ambitions concerning her life; she prioritizes her future plans over Ben's career as an aware independent woman. Later, she hears that Ben has been living his life as a successful man performing the traditional male identity and having a wife who takes care of him and his two children as a claim of his male "rights". Linda M. Blum in her journal article "Feminism and the Mass Media: a Case Study of "The Women's Room" as a Novel and Television Film" affirms Mira's position to Ben's decision as an independent woman: "Mira would not let him dominate her life; she would not have his

children nor accompany him to Africa, and it is clear that he wants a woman who would" (11). She adds:

> In other words, it is as if Mira was, on some level, thinking that if she had another child, she would be in a similar position with Ben as she had been with Norm, or that the problems might be the same. If she had another child she might again have to sacrifice her desire for autonomy and the pursuit of her career, becoming again subordinate to a husband, a man, who has a place in the outer world. (12)

Remarkably, in *The Women's Room*, Mira and Ben dispute contradicts between the need for independence, to be autonomous, and the need to be dependent, or to be related to another person. Individual autonomy is autonomy is symbolized by French as an academic career which reflects the individual's value and self-worth in the society; whereas, the need for dependence is proven by giving up some extent of individuality, surrendering some autonomy for the feeling of relatedness and having a family as a proof of love ; Blum comments : "It becomes a question for many women of whether they will give up part of their selfhood for a relationship or family, or whether they will give up the need to be in a relationship or to have a family in order to realize a sense of autonomous selfhood" (14).

Social theorists such as Jessica Benjamin, Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein have underlined how the conflict between the human needs for independence and for subordination become more problematic for women in contemporary society and especially by the beginning of the feminist movement activism. They assert that women are always the ones who most clearly feel this identity-issue as family entity changes in which women role in society changes from single and autonomous female to married and dependent wife or from a a committed

mother to a divorced and free woman"Men have always had the benefit of both autonomy and dependence in the family; they were not the ones assigned to surrender their individuality to create and maintain family life. Women provided this for them. If women cease to provide this because they desire equality, one wonders who will" (qtd. in Blum 14-5).

It is true that Mira emerges from the cycle of subordination and charts her way towards independence, she has chosen that her life would be far from childbearning and patriarchal system where man is the dominant, but at the end she finds herself alone in her empty room reading papers and drinking brandies. Mira feels emptiness and bitterness. Strikingly, she does complete her dissertation, but unfortunately, the best she can achieve is to teach in an isolated area in Maine, where she teaches composition courses, and "Grammar 12" (Blum 18). French says : "...Nobody wanted to hire a woman over forty even if she had a Harvard degree..." (ch. 6; sec. 2). Thus, Mira's search is unsatisfied, her goal is uncertain. It can be said that, Mira selfhood and identity construction cost her her happiness which pushes Mira at the end to insanity. French states : 'a good life is one in which no part of the self is stifled, denied, or permitted to oppress another part of the self, in which the whole being has room to grow. But room costs something, everything costs something, and no matter what we choose, we are never happy about paying for it' (ch. 4; sec. 1).

How does it end? Mira endures, but her challenge against a male dominated society and the patriarchal system leads her to insanity, sadness and loneliness. In conclusion, the novel provides a detailed account of women's sufferance in marriage in which they face all kinds of abuse, sexual, physical and psychological brutality in the American society during the 19th century. Moreover, *The Women's Room* discusses the notion of divorce and its impact on oppressed women, it gives further details upon the

woman's issues in a male dominated system by giving a story of revolutionary divorced woman who refuses to accept such sexist reality. French implies that women have a lot of work to do to achieve independent identity because the man is not jus at home but he is every where. Moreover, Mira's insanity at the end of the story and the presence of the unreal man she claims to see in her apartment whom he tries to kill her makes Mira feel no fear which explains both, Mira's victory in the patriarchal society as she does not feel no more fear from any man; from the other side, Mira's insanity symbolizes her release from the oppression she lived in from her childhood to her middle age, at the age of fourty. Though Mira could not find a satisfied answer for her 'self', but she succeeds in being her own property rather than a man's property. She finally traces her position in the society as an independent individual since at the end of the narrative Mira lives alone; her loneliness is her independence where she feels free far from any restrictions.

Conclusion

The Women's Room by Marilyn French, which was published in 1977, changed lives of many women since its publication. French's novel is one of the most intriguing and captivating novels which reflects on the life conditions of many oppressed wives and mothers during the 19th century. Critics consider *The Women's Room* as the one which unveiled and unmasked the reemerging repressed beliefs and unspoken realities of the American society. Looking into the social and stereotypical norms of the society is considered as the significant characteristics of French's novels that deal with the woman's case. This thesis has demostrated how the the perpetual construction of identity comes from the rejection of the unfair practices of the society and speaking out against all forms of brutality that mute women's raising awareness which is mirrored by Mira's torment against marital abuse and men's rule as she struggles and suffers to achieve her self-realization and fights to accomplish her intellectual and academic aspirations in the realm of patriarchy on the expense of her happiness. As a feminist production, *The Women's Room* succeeds in changing the lives of so many females who consider this masterpiece as basis to their rebellion. Marilyn French has essentially paved the way for those women who suffered and still suffering from the patriarchal inequality and encourages them to gain their freedom and to prove themselves and keep up with men in the areas they monopolized.

In the context of liberal feminism, marriage restricts women and deprives them of their freedom and prevents them from enjoying their natural rights like having an academic accomplishment or an educational level. Whereas divorce has a negative meaning which is interpreted through the psychological gap women face after a long life of obedience which may later on causes women's trauma as they find themselves

without the power they used to depend on in all aspects of life, in the novel, divorce grants women freedom and free them from men's dependence.

Marilyn French's novel definitely covers the most sensitive topics that affected, and still do affect, women, such as rape, motherhood, abortion, madness, inequality. The search for identity takes an ambiguous course in French's work *The Women's Room*, in which the heroine goes in dark turns that is full of humiliating events and psychological pain and anguish from childhood to marriage, divorce, and ultimately, her independent identity in the post-divorce. She asserts how the theme of identity for women cannot be discussed without looking at the difficult and sensitive outcomes of madness interpreting the harsh journey of identity quest and the sad result of women's independence against any kind of relation with man.

Mira in French's novel, *The Women's Room,* fails to adjust to the harsh realities of life imposed on her by her parents as well as the patriarchal powers exercised on her from both, Lanny and Norm. Mira couldn't reach her happy ending till she freed herself from all men's bonds. At the end of the novel, it is shown clearly how the protagonist succeeds in attaining an independent identity after a long struggle against the patriarchal practices and social expectations, though it is also clearly shown that Mira's struggle and quest is uncompleted as she partially achieves her goal. French, at the end of her novel, confirms the non-finished fight of the second feminist wave and depicts the bitter reality that men's control over women would never end without the help of all women who suffer from the same life conditions. It is a clear call upon the need to stop the stereotypical image which gives man priority in all spheres of life and that identity quest alone is never enough as her purpose goes beyond independence rather; it tends to eradicate the male supremacy from the bones of the American society.

The present study tackles the feminist identity. The first chapter has given a the history of the American women to gain their rights by tracing the three waves of the feminist movement and the major and most significant events which characterized each phase as an attempt to attain women's rights in the period after the WWII to the late of the twentieth century. The chapter shifts its focus later to the feminist revolution in the literary canon in which it gives the notable names of the pioneers of the feminist case and their major and most significant works which provide the first steps towards attaining women's rights as their works inspired the majority of women if not all who were subjected under man's brutality and inequality.

Though these intellectual figures of the literary canon addressed all women who suffered from subordination during the period from the 1800s to the late 1900s, this chapter gives a specific emphasis on feminist American literature. In the third section of the chapter, more emphasis is put on the representation of the quest of identity in the feminist theory and how many feminist writers mirrored the theme of identity of the American women generation in their works by providing new way of writing and presenting this later from their own point of view unlike the past centuries when the theme of female identity and the representation of women in general in the American literature was allowed only to men who used to present this theme in accordance with the stereotypical ideals and beliefs given to women and which consider woman as a slave and an object of sexual desire.

The second chapter has studied the theme of identity in the work of Marilyn French *The Women's Room* in the social context. It proves a deep insight into the American society and reflects the patriarchal abuse on women and especially on French Protagonist, Mira, whose life is characterized with the restrictions of her family that bind her during her childhood to unmask her female identity in a world submitted to

man's rule. It is shown in this chapter how American women are tied to the ancient traditions in which women must show complete compliance to the social rules by performing the common role of the ideal housewife which appears in most of Mira's childhood in her relationship with her mother who tries to teach her the feminist manners of the American society. The chapter has focused on the central protagonist life, it also has examined how Mira's raising awareness in her childhood helps her to draw the stereotypical picture of the feminist identity in her school, neighborhood and house as all the forms of abuse and brutality practiced on women are legally authorized. Thus the chapter analyzes and gives the smooth evanescence of the female identity in the woman's growth from childhood to adolescence.

The third chapter has studied the quest of female identity in relation to the theme of marriage, divorce and rebellion. It analyzes the life of many women beyond the domestic spheres. It interprets the bitter reality of the American society by reflecting women's ignorance, misery, abuse, torment, insanity, rape, suicide, pregnancy, commands, education, vanished identity and all the negative qualities women acquired after giving up themselves to THEM as the writer refers to throughout the whole novel as MEN. It takes picture of how most of American women accept the dreadful life they are trapped in with a full satisfaction. Eventually, this chapter has also focused on the theme of identity quest by examining the outcomes of divorce as the sole solution for women's salvation from the spectrum of domestic life and male obedience where it has scrutinized the protagonist's attempts to escape the cage of marriage and run after her own aspirations and academic fulfillments as a call to all women and female readers not only in America but in the world wide as the writer claims in the beginning of her novel to oppose all fforms of abuse and construct their own independent identity.

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Résumé

Cette thèse examine la recherche d'identité féminine dans « La Chambre des Femme » de Marilyn French et comment les pratiques patriciales qui ont caractérisés la société américaine dans les années 1960 et 1970 ont affecté la recherche des femmes sur l'identité et leurs développements de la conscience de soi. Par conséquent cette étude a comme but d'étudier la réfraction et la fission de l'identité de l'héroïne principal, Mira Ward, tout au long son parcours pour abonner son rôle de femme soumise et indécise pour adopter une autonomie égale au milieu de la pléthore d'expérience qu'elle subit, et de rechercher des solutions alternatives à l'indépendances et à l'auto participation .

Il est d'abord également la question de la quête de l'identité et du sens de la vie chez les femmes, et explore de manière émouvante les effets psychiques et physiques du système dominé par les hommes sur les femmes, passant par l'enfance de l'héroïne principale a la féminité.

A travers une approche psychanalytique, cet article cherche a analyser comment le mariage le divorce, avec ses terribles effets sur la femme après une longue vie de dépendance à l'égard de l'homme, constitue une nouvelle forme de soulagement à libérer les femmes de la souffrance qu'elles ont goutées dans leurs expériences conjugales passées. D'une part l'étude cherche à remédier aux obstacles qui ont entrainé la formation de l'identité de l'héroïne principale, notamment les restrictions familiales et le coût social d'être une femme, un amoureux, une mère, une femme divorcée ainsi qu'un activiste politique. Dans un monde qui voit la femme une créature inferieure. Et d'autre part, elle élucide clairement la fragmentation de l'identité féminine en soulignant non seulement les facteurs et aspects des règles sociales injustes de sa vie, mais aussi en les rapportant aux évènements historiques et aux

divisions de la structure de la société américaine au cours du 19éme siècle qui reflète l'expérience personnelle de l'écrivaine elle-même   .

C'est pourquoi cette recherche tente d'explorer le statut social des femmes dans « La Chambre des femmes » (1997) et de déterminer comment la violence domestique, physique et sexuelle dissocie l'identité féminine dans un système à prédominance masculine. il tente également de mettre en lumière le rôle crucial du féminisme qui joue un rôle important dans l'éveil de la conscience féminine, lui permettant se libérer des pratiques injustes qui sont imposées et de réaliser son autonomie.

La conclusion générale qui constitue l'essence de cette analyse est que Frensh utilise son expérience personnelle reflétée dans son œuvre « La Chambre des Femmes » pour sensibiliser et aider les femmes opprimées sous la suprématie de l'homme et demander des reformes constitutionnelle et politiques pour donner aux femmes leur égalité dans la communauté américaine dans le contexte du féminisme libéral.

Mots clés : patriciale , identité , féminisme , autonomie , enfance , mariage , divorce , épanouissement personnel , société , dépendance , indépendance.

ملخص

تفحص هذه الأطروحة البحث الأنثوي للهوية في رواية غرفة النساء لمارلين الفرنسية و كيف للممارسات البطريركية التي ميزت المجتمع الأمريكي خلال الستينات و السبعينيات أن تؤثر على بحث النساء عن الهوية و تطور وعيهن الذاتي. و بالتالي تهدف هذه الدراسة استيضاح الانكسار و الانقسام في هوية البطل الرئيسي 'ميرا ورد' طوال رحلتها للتخلي عن دورها كامرأة خاضعة و غير لتبني الاستقلالية المتساوية بين كل من الرجل والمرأة وسط عدد كبير من التجارب المريرة التي مرت في حياتها بحثا عن خيارات تمكنها من الاستقلال بذاتها وتحقيق الحرية. كما يتتبع موضوع البحث عن الهوية والمعنى في الحياة بالنسبة للمرأة و يستكشف بشكل مؤثر الآثار النفسية والجسدية المؤلمة للنظام الذي يسيطر عليه ويحتكره الذكور على النساء خلال فترة التحول بين طفولة البطلة الرئيسية إلى مرحلة أنوثتها.

من خلال استخدام النهج النسائي تسعى هذه الورقة إلى تحليل كيف يساهم الزواج في جعل المرأة خاضعة للرجل وكيف يأتي الطلاق بآثاره الفظيعة على تحرير النساء بعد المعاناة التي ذاقوها في تجاربهم الزوجية السابقة, من ناحية تسعى الدراسة إلى معالجة العوائق التي أدت إلى تشكيل هوية بطل الرواية الرئيسي بما في ذلك القيود العائلية والتكلفة الاجتماعية لكونها امرأة متزوجة آم امرأة مطلقة وكذلك سياسية ناشطة في عالم يرى المرأة كمخلوق أدنى ولكن من ناحية أخرى يفسر بوضوح التجزؤ داخل الهوية النسائية من خلال تسليط الضوء ليس فقط على عوامل وجوانب القواعد الاجتماعية غير العادلة في حياة البطلة ولكن أيضا من خلال ربطه بالعنف المنزلي والبدني و الجنسي الذي يؤثر سلبا في محو الهوية الأنثوية في نظام التمييز الجنسي الذي يسيطر عليه الذكور .

وكما تحاول هذه الأطروحة أيضا إلقاء الضوء على الدور الحاسم للمرأة والذي يلعب دورا مهما في مهمة إيقاظ الوعي النسائي للمرأة مما يمكنها من تحرير نفسها من الممارسات غير العادلة التي تفرض عليها و تحقيق الاعتماد على الذات .

الاستنتاج العام الذي هو جوهر هذا التحليل هو أن الروائية فرانش تستخدم تجربتها الشخصية المنعكسة في عملها ، "غرفة النساء" لرفع الوعي النسائي و مساعدة هؤلاء النساء المضطهدات تحت سلطة الذكور في الدعوة إلى إصلاحات دستورية و سياسية شاملة لمنح النساء المساواة في المجتمع الأمريكي في سياق النسوة الليبرالية .

الكلمات المفتاح : البطريركية ، الهوية ، النسوة، الحكم الذاتي، الطفولة ، الزواج ، الطلاق ، تحقيق الذات، المجتمع، التبعية، الاستقلال.