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*THE POSTCOLONIAL TRIANGLE: INSTANCES OF FEMINISM IN SELECTED WORKS BY
SHASHI DESHPANDE, NADINE GORDIMER, AND MARGARET ATWOOD*

SUMMARY

Since the 1970s, the questioning and criticism of feminist researchers strive to show the androcentric character of the human and social sciences and to make women stand out as subjects apart, likely to be studied from a multidisciplinary approach. It is from this questioning that the Women's Studies were born in the United States, with the aim, both scientific and political, to make women and their actions visible. Now, the definition of such a subject as "Women" must avoid the pitfall of naturalizing an eternal and immutable feminine identity, based on the so-called biological evidence. On the contrary, it is a question of highlighting the fact that identities and the relations of individuals, men and women, are constructed and elaborate in societies through a complex network of meanings, interests and hierarchies, and that these identities have meaning only insofar as they are established in a relationship that is both interdependent and unequal. There is, in all societies, a hierarchy between the sexes, socially and culturally constructed, from which relationships of domination that condition, in a great measure, the lives of individuals. It is this elaboration of identities sexual relations, which includes relations of domination and hierarchy that is included under the name of gender, which thus constitutes a concept and a field of study.

Women are defined not by an immutable sexual identity, but by the constraints and perspectives that the attribution of this sexual identity supposes, and by the place they occupy in a given society. But these constraints, perspectives and places are themselves dynamic. The feminine identity is evolving thanks to the actions developed by women themselves with a view to improve their situation and to move the balance of power towards equality. Our approach comes from a gender perspective that takes into account the constructed nature of sexual identities as well as a framework arising from gender relations and in which the actions of women appear and develop.

Since the very beginning, Feminist research has focused on this ability of women to take action and to put in place strategies to deal with power. Power is here not designed in a localized way (like the power of the state for example) but, in the Foucaultian way, as a complex and multipolar set that regulates and limits the actions of individuals by setting standards enforced by an institutional network that ends up being internalized by the individuals themselves.

On their side, women have always been able to develop strategies to achieve their ends, by taking advantage of the margins left by the gender norms or broadening them through complex processes of resistance and negotiation, which sometimes manage to force the power(s) to adapt to the demands of women.

Postcolonial feminism is in line with postcolonial studies, the paternity of which is attributed to Edward Said (1935-2003) and in particular to his book *Orientalism*, published in 1978. Professor of comparative literature, born in Palestine and trained in the American Academy, Said produced a pioneering work on the ideological construction of the East as the legitimation of European imperialism. He underlined the orientalist character of the paradigms of Western thought, and attempted to understand the process by which the Orientalist vision was continuously developed and regenerated. Orientalism aims to apply to the East a system of binary representations: the East—or rather the idea of the East—is the mirror of the West (understood by Said as England, France and the United States) and is essentialized and reduced to a number of stereotypes. The Oriental is defined by Orientalism as a passive, lazy, instinctive, spiritual being, of unbridled sexuality. While the West is inexorably moving towards progress, the East remains backward and stagnant in tradition. Needless to say, the characteristics of the Oriental make him belong to the feminine whereas those of the Westerner are coded as masculine. According to Said, the West would not exist without the East, and it needs this repulsive figure to be confronted in its natural superiority. The current academic and media discourse around issues Arabic is representative of contemporary Orientalism, especially since September 11, 2001: the Arab world is characterized by its irrationality (religion as the only law), its inability to pacify itself and its retrograde and obscurantist values.

Lila Abu-Lughod (2001) believes that Orientalism has paved the way for postcolonial feminism and has provided its authors with rich theoretical tools. It is part of Said's legacy of, but like others, she reproaches him for his "blindness" on the fundamentally sexed and sexist dimension of Orientalism. Meyda Yegenoglu (1998) has done much to renew Said's analysis of Orientalism by studying the gendered nature of the colonial relationship. She showed how representations of sexual and cultural difference are inextricably linked and are constitutive of each other. Postcolonial feminists have thus drawn heavily from Said's theoretical repertoire, and contributed by their criticisms and extensions to make it more complex.

Postcolonial feminist thought also relied on Subaltern Studies, founded in 1981 by Indian historian Ranajit Guha, a professor at the University of Sussex, England. This unprecedented historiographical project was born from the virulent criticism of an elitist historiography whose analysis of Indian nationalism was either idealistic or solely oriented towards the elite. The objective of Subaltern Studies is to explain "the contribution, by the people themselves, that is, independently of the elite, to the construction and development of this nationalism" (Guha, 1982: 3), and to "produce historical analyses where groups of subordinates are perceived as subjects of their own history" (Chakrabarty, 2002: 472). Guha and his team of Subaltern Studies describe a colonial society with dynamic, hybrid and contradictory social relations, concepts that postcolonial feminists have taken up again to show the intertwining of sex and race dynamics in the elaboration of colonial power.

Postcolonial feminism was inspired by Subaltern Studies in its determination to think resistances and to make an analysis that takes into account different scales of observation to reveal the complexity of oppression systems. This connection between Subaltern Studies and postcolonial feminism undoubtedly explains the extraordinary production of Indian feminists. Postcolonial feminism was born mainly from the production of dissident feminists who challenged the "universalism" of white and western feminism. What these feminisms have in common is their reading of the oppression of women in light of racism, slavery and/or colonization. Thus, black feminism, chicana feminism, Arab feminism or indigenous feminism have upset feminist analyses by putting into perspective the different relations of domination that force racialized women. All this work has helped to rethink concepts such as family, work or violence in the light of colonial history (that is, that of racialized women) and created oppressive configurations and

possibilities of resistance different from those that the dominant feminist thought had envisioned for them.

All these writers and the currents that characterize them, all contributed to the emergence of a postcolonial feminism that places the experience of colonization, slavery and racism at the heart of its feminist analysis. In this, it is difficult to separate postcolonial feminists from black, Chicanas, Arab or indigenous feminists. We can hypothesize that postcolonial feminism is a product of all these thoughts, and that all these thoughts are found in postcolonial feminism, without, however, denying each one a proper existence.

This is the main domain of our dissertation that covers selected works of three women writers belonging to India, South Africa, And Canada—hence the title we have chosen, *The Postcolonial Triangle: Instances of Feminism in Selected Works of Shashi Deshpande, Nadine Gordimer, and Margaret Atwood*—the key words of which are “postcolonial” and feminism. It has not been an easy task to distinguish the differences and similitudes between the three writers, belonging to three different cultural and geographical spaces. If South Africa and India are closely related through the work of Mahatma Gandhi, then Canada comes as a special belonging to the British Crown, where the feminist debate acquires a special dimension due to the bilingual nature of the country. If Shashi Deshpande deals with the condition of women in patriarchal Indian society and, Nadine Gordimer’s characters “are both internal battlegrounds in which the conflicts of South African society are played out, and meeting places where illicit relationships between the races develop” (Visel 1988: 35), the TV serial based on Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* brought to the attention of the public at large the condition of woman in the contemporary Western world.

I have approached Shashi Deshpande, Nadine Gordimer, and Margaret Atwood from a comparative and contextual perspective with the declared purpose to (1) establish a necessary post-colonial and feminist critical background for the writers and their works; (2) situate the fictions of the three women writers within the corpus of ethnic and mainstream literary criticism; (3) to position these fictions within their historical and socio-political contexts; (4) shift the focus from the female protagonists to male and minor characters in order to explore how the writers construct a conciliatory position within the South African, Indian, and Canadian society, thus

preserving their identity while responding to the demands of a completely new environment; and (5) to focus on the three writers' views of Otherness that lead to a redefinition of generalizations, stereotypes and national identity.

Considering the main objectives of my research, I have approached the selected novels from Indian, South African, and Canadian literatures to discover the differences and similitudes between the three writers' understanding of the condition of women—in patriarchal and traditional Indian society, during the Apartheid years in South Africa, and in an imagined dystopian society in present-day United States of America. My study answers a number of questions related to the main objectives outlined above: (1) defines the geographical, cultural, and political context that defines the works of the three selected writer analysed: Shashi Deshpande, Nadine Gordimer, and Margaret Atwood; (2) establishes the local variants of feminism as they manifested themselves under the different conditions of Apartheid-era South Africa, patriarchal, post-colonial India, and present-day Canada; (3) determines the relationship between postcolonial studies and feminism, starting from the assumption that the goal of postcolonial discourses and feminism is the integration of marginalized women into society; (4) discusses instances in which feminism brought to light many issues that post-colonialism had left obscure, and the extent to which postcolonialism helped feminism to guard against Western assumptions of antifeminist discourse; (5) it delineates the work of these writers along the guidelines of the feminist and postcolonial theory, and underlines Shashi Deshpande's exploration of the individual and universal female psyche, Nadine Gordimer's attempts to free fiction from all allegiance to enable it to be "true", at the height of human experience, and Margaret Atwood's depiction of a world in which the violence of Christian theocracy and sexual discrimination reached a grim apogee, which deprived women of most of their rights and freedoms.

However, certain restrictions apply, imposed by the limited time and space does not allow for detailed incursions into the development of the three waves of feminism and the postcolonial interpretation of the fiction of Indian Anglophone novelists, of the literatures of multicultural South Africa in the aftermath of the Apartheid, or the Canadian literary response to the women's emancipation movement of the last decade. Nor could we cover the complete works of the three women writers, limiting ourselves—besides short outlines of their work—to only one novel for

each author: *That Long Silence* (Shashi Deshpande), *Burger's Daughter* (Nadine Gordimer), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Margaret Atwood).

Our dissertation entitled *The Postcolonial Triangle: Stances of Feminism in Selected Works by Shashi Deshpande, Nadine Gordimer, and Margaret Atwood* is conveniently structured into Introduction, three parts (each including three chapters), and Concluding Remarks. All the illustrations belong to the public domain. The Works Consulted includes the primary and secondary sources, with the URL for the online resources. The Summaries in English, Romanian, and Arabic have been added as Annexes to the end.

The Introduction: Empire, Independent Nations, Philosophies establishes the background for the future critical discourse and discusses the presence of the British Empire—on which “the sun never set”—in India, South Africa, and Canada. It underlines the post-World War II process of decline and even dissolution of the colonial empire, as a result of the independence movements followed by the process of decolonization that eventually resulted in the reverse movement, from the margins of the former empire to the centre, with unexpected consequences: the “home-rule” movement in India to which Mahatma Gandhi conferred mass dimensions and which later became a pacifist, country-wide, mass manifestation. The fierce reprimand by the British of the Boer republics in South Africa was followed by reforms that led to the establishment of the Union of South Africa (1909), and finally to the formation of the Republic of South Africa. Also, the independence of Canada, and its development as a nation ready to adopt the concepts of cultural diversity and multiculturalism has been mentioned and discussed.

We found it necessary to point out the numerous definitions of “postcolonialism” and the nominal expressions to which the term “postcolonial” is attached. “Postcolonial literature,” “postcolonial theory,” or “postcolonial studies” do not give a synthetic picture of what can designate both an academic, geographical and political space and a historical transition period, a cultural place, and a theoretical position. As regards Feminism, we are considering the particular feminist views belonging to the three geographical spaces that our dissertation covers—Indian, South African, Canadian—with the purpose of identifying those differences and similitudes which give feminism a universal dimension.

PART ONE: *Theoretical and Cultural Background* follows the lines of thought underlined in the Introduction, but goes even further, tackling such controversial issues as postcolonialism and its most important theoreticians, the importance of Englishness and the extent to which it shaped the way the English and colonials viewed themselves within this imposed cultural hierarchy, and woman's condition as seen by the feminist theory in the three countries that form what we have called "the postcolonial triangle"—India, South Africa, and Canada.

Chapter One: *The Remains of the Empire: Colonialism vs. Postcolonialism* delimitates the three phases in the history of postcolonialism, and its main theoreticians—Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Homi Bhabha—and discusses at length the theory of Orientalism as formulated by Edward Said, for whom the Orient is an imaginary construct of the West, and postcolonialism becomes a critique of the Euro-centrism of the Western world, which tends to view the Eastern world as an object of analysis, while having the monopoly of theoretical and academic fields. We also review the critical positions taken by Gayatri Spivak or Ania Loomba, who (for example) comments on the Europeans' encounters with the Other during the Renaissance, and their understanding of Otherness through the filter of their ideological and cultural limitations. Literature becomes a space that renders the trajectories of each nation. The writers' task is to decompose and recompose the meanings of history, asking themselves questions and striving to solve the ambiguities, struggling against a homogenization made possible by the levelling of imagological paradigms. We conclude that postcolonial theory is built from the colonial experiences of people who engaged in liberation struggles around the world; it bears witness to constant cultural forces for representation, and it raises self-consciousness which revolutionises the minds of the colonised and the coloniser to build a new society where liberty and equity prevail.

Chapter Two: *Postcolonial Landscapes (Mostly Literary)* shifts the focus from "what is postcolonialism" to "who is postcolonial", and the different position taken by other scholars (such as Anthony Kwame Appiah), who challenge the main theory that seems to have produced a critique without object. We highlighted the impact of Said statements about the role of the English novels and language in "in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences." It is a theory that leads to an examination of Englishness, of how it could reach its elevated status throughout the empire, and shaped the English and colonials' view of themselves

within the imperial cultural hierarchy. The linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity of the British Empire led to the creation of new terms, such as “Anglo-Indian Literature” (or, Indo-English) or “Caribbean Literature”, while the terms applied to the literature in the former British colonies ranged from “Commonwealth literatures” to “Anglophone Literatures” or “Literatures in English”. These novels follow a pattern in which the monologic model is gradually replaced by the one in which the monocultural identity, imagined utopian but always materialized dystopically, is denied and released by the epiphany of hybridity. References are made about the multifaceted legacy of the British presence in India: political, cultural, even linguistic, if we consider the impact of English on the everyday discourse. The traumatic experience of Apartheid in South Africa is also discussed, with a stress on literature, a field in which local identities can borrow patterns and processes of self-definition. Finally, we analyzed the specific conditions in Canada, concluding that Canadian multiculturalism is a way of seeing the world that has been prepared for a long time. It is the culmination of British multiculturalism as it was articulated in the period of the two World Wars; it appears as a postcolonial product, and Anglocentrism is the dominant model in the relationship of cultures in Canada.

Chapter Three: *Feminist (Postcolonial) Anxieties* starts from the assumption that postcolonial feminist theories have racialized feminist theory, and that feminist anti-racist policies are born out of the recognition of women’s diversity and their anti-imperialist campaigns. Their message is to invite all women to see each other and their own experiences and knowledge as situated, socially constructed, and marked by race, class, gender, sexuality or ethnicity. Gayatri Spivak invites feminist critics not to indulge in the lies of a global sorority whose fascinating model remains the man and the woman, partners/opponents of generalizable or universalisable sexuality. We have also devoted some space to the treatment of the Arab/Muslim women and Islam, simplified to one or two suras or injunctions such as those relating to the hierarchy of genres. Women are deprived of their own existence, and are viewed through the lens of religious practices (even fundamentalism).

One major development in South Africa is Black feminism that denounces the ignorance and contempt of white feminists for the condition of women of colour and their experience of patriarchal oppression. It is a version of feminism that takes into account the crossed relations of “race” and sex. The tendency to treat women as recipients of a policy of the government and not

as actors in the construction of new states is probably exacerbated in the case of South Africa, which focuses primarily on class and race dynamics and pays little attention to the issue of sexual difference. Many feminist theorists have come to the conclusion that “women’s interests” are shaped by political and social institutions.

The last part of this extended chapter deals with different theoretical aspects regarding the feminist political novel as the voice of dominance relations. Most of the fictional texts with central female characters can empirically extract observations about the common social context of women’s existence in different countries, about the fact that women live in societies with more or less patriarchal accents, but anyway, implying a certain degree of discrimination against women. We conclude that the feminist novel is in this perspective ideological, that is, deeply political—a political novel with an explicit ideological sense, with very strong touches in the fictional texts, where the characters involved in the phenomenologies of social protests and conflicts enter into the scene, with psychological states.

PART TWO: *Portraits* is intended as a triptych of bio-bibliographic portraits of the three women writers analysed, with a special stress on their place in the cultural environment they belong to, and an outline of their most representative works.

Chapter Four: *Shashi Deshpande and the Plight of the Indian Woman Novelist* first establishes the context and background for the writer’s work: India, the fourth most dangerous place in the world for women, a society still rooted in dangerous patriarchal traditions where women have always been considered the exclusive property of their father and then of their husband, with shared authorities via the brother or eldest son, according to the marital status of the woman, and where the feminist movements work day after day to defend the position of women. Feminism in India argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably linked; the essence of Indian feminism is not a gender problem or a challenge of traditional male hegemony, but the existence of a total entity of womanhood, completely separate from the man’s world. For the theoretical support we mention the works of theorists like Martha Nussbaum, Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, or Ann duCille. Chandra Talpade Mohanty denounces the way in which Western feminist writing colonizes the heterogeneity of the experience of the “Third World Woman”, and

insists on the necessity of a deconstruction of the image erected by the discourses stemming from the Western humanism.

In her novels, Shashi Deshpande projects a realistic picture of the middle class educated woman who, although financially independent, is still facing the problems of adjustment between idealism and pragmatism. Her novels are based on the lives of women and their problems in the Indian context. She has explored the realities behind the silence of women, and she raised her voice against the oppression of women and created mass awareness in the matter through her writings. Shashi Deshpande occupies a significant place among the contemporary women novelists who concern themselves with the problems of women and their quest for identity. Her creative talent and accomplishment have established her credentials as a worthy successor and contemporary to the Indian English writers such as Anita Desai, Shobha De, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Bharati Mukherjee etc. She is the only Indian author who has made a bold attempt to give voice to the frustrations and disappointments of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist. She chooses the educated Indian woman as the protagonist of many of her works. In novels like *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) show the deep rootedness of traditional ideas, which does not yet allow the Indian women to live totally without them, and they continue to mark their life in a clear way, and succumb to social pressure, to tradition, while their desires for change are not realized. *That Long Silence* (1989), the novel that will be analyzed at length in Chapter Seven, also focuses on the condition of women, with a particular stress on the female protagonist who, by the similitudes between her condition and Deshpande's private life, makes the novel self-referential. The women's limited role in the Indian society and their lack of freedom, combined with men's stereotypical notions and their ancestral patriarchal attitudes confer a special interest to the novel in which we discern a tone of anger and pain that the novelist uses to capture both the man-woman relationship, the rituals and customs that give shape to the women's private life, and the collective unconscious of her women characters.

Chapter Five: Nadine Gordimer: *Life With and After Apartheid* is an introduction in the work of Nadine Gordimer that deals with themes of love and politics, particularly concerning race in South Africa, questioning power relations and truth, telling stories of ordinary people, and revealing moral ambiguities and choices in the context of South African literature that reflects

the social and political conditions of the country. The transition from colonial to postcolonial society is marked by the writing of the first European or South African authors of Europeans. One type of novel that has its own history in South Africa is the political novel. Many have been and are the writers to deal with the country's political problems. In Nadine Gordimer's novels history is presented as a narrative that offers versions about the events that would have occurred one day, narratives that were elaborated subjectively from objective data, by choices made by the historian before an infinite horizon of themes.

Belonging to "a minority within a minority", Gordimer opposed the system and intimately desired for a union with the true majority of the country—the black population. Her novels are permeated by political questions and intimate dialogue. She demonstrates that for the construction of the superiority of one nation, it is necessary to construct a "lower" one, by the process of "othering". It is a novel that addresses racial prejudice and segregation, space and displacement play an essential role, because this colour barrier is within those limits, thus excluding the conviviality between blacks and whites. She fought against racial and ethnic prejudices and always defended the broader aspects of politics and history, even though her accounts were full of moral and psychological tensions. The very notion of "South African literature" presupposes, to varying degrees and without prejudging a wider extension of the issues it addresses or the forms it takes, that it can be identified more or less directly to one or more of its national particularities—social, political or cultural, for example—in a given period. Among these features, the most visible is of a linguistic nature, which justifies, in part, reference to separate South African literatures and, in view of the divisive policies that have marked the country's history, almost autonomous.

Chapter Six: Margaret Atwood: Challenging Present, Uncertain Future starts from the assumption that the feminist trait in Atwood's novels has its basis in the predominance of female protagonists, inserted in narratives structured through the retrospect of their lives. Often, her novels present an identity crisis, the result of conflicting relationships, seeking solutions in the mnemonic reconstruction of lived experiences, and often returning to places of origin. She adheres to a very individualistic and humanist vision of the female population, and she redefines rather the very essence of feminine aspirations and illustrates their complex nature, unstable and varied because personalized. The nature of Atwoodian women does not depend on their status as

a woman, but on their story that shaped them to become what they are in the space of the novel. The writer adheres to a very individualistic and humanist vision of the female population, and when she addresses the question of women's desires, she does not limit herself to the search for a single answer to this enigma, she redefines rather the very essence feminine aspirations and illustrates their complex nature, unstable and varied because personalized.

The theoretical background is feminism, seen as a movement that aims to expand the role and rights of women in society and aims at creating a system where both partners respect each other and share responsibility for home and children, and where complicity and complementarity outweigh rivalry and domination. The nature of Atwoodian women does not depend on their status as a woman, but on their story that shaped them to become what they are in the space of the novel. Her novels are populated by women who oppose the normative conception of femininity, and are able to manage their lives as they see fit and can assert their own opinions. She places her female protagonists in a personal fictional universe that she calls "ustopia" – at the same time utopia and dystopia, a mapped location and a state of mind. It is a universe that surprisingly supports all the preferred themes of feminist discourse: maternity, the mother-daughter dialectic, the anguish around the female body, the female psychology and her place in the male-dominated society. Margaret Atwood defies the established order of literary characterization by forging strong feminine characters that do not respect traditional patterns at all, who do not depend on their status as a woman, but on their story that shaped them to become what they are in the space of the novel. Her novels are populated by women who radically oppose the normative conception of femininity.

PART THREE: *Feminism without Borders (Three Case Studies)* represents the purely analytical segment of our dissertation, for which we have selected three different novels written by Shashi Deshpande, Nadine Gordimer, and Margaret Atwood—*That Long Silence*, *Burger's Daughter*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*—which we consider representative to our demonstration of the postcolonial triangle that brings together the work of three women writers, from three continents, united by their preoccupation with and interest in the condition of woman in the modern world. Their feminism, openly stated or carefully dissimulated, is the element that ensures the theoretical cohesion to our critical discourse. The reason is that Feminism is based on concrete historical and cultural realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions. There is no

abstract definition always applicable to all women. Feminism is articulated in different ways that depend on local situations and the time, country, culture and education. Within the same country, feminism is articulated in different ways, since it is articulated by different women depending on the class, the context, the level of education, the conscience, etc.

Chapter Seven: *The Legend of the Sparrow and the Crow* is a close reading of one of the much praised novels by Shashi Deshpande—*That Long Silence*—a novel that meets all the elements necessary for its interpretation from the perspectives offered by two theoretical systems: postcolonialism and feminism. For this reason, our analysis could not avoid—at the risk of repetition—the references to some of the theoretical concepts and principles already outlined in the previous chapters.

On the Indian subcontinent, Feminism is understood as an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labor, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation. Despite the non-aggressive connotation of *narithwa*—the Hindi language equivalent for “feminism”—the concepts of feminism (understood as vindication of economic independence, employment, equal rights, etc.), when they allude to “the problems that concern women”, are easily understood in each of the vernacular languages in India (Lal 2000).

Shashi Deshpande's novel offers a realistic view of contemporary middle-class Indian women, often caught between the constraints of a millenary tradition and the freedoms of a new India increasingly influenced by Western ideas. One has to be “hard and ruthless” if one tries to achieve anything in life, says the protagonist Jaya. The writer reveals the consciousness of the protagonist by exposing her mind as she thinks, feels, and reacts to the stimuli of the moment and the situation. In doing so, she goes on to assert the feminine psyche of Jaya, breaking away from the constraints of a disordered social fabric deeply rooted in patriarchy which equally repels as it attracts. All along the novel, the protagonist goes through the three stages encountered by all the sub-cultures (according to Elaine Showalter): imitation, protest, and self-discovery; Jaya, despite her Western education and knowledge of Western thought, ends up yearning to be considered a perfect wife. She opts for silence and passivity. Having decided to write, the Indian women break all those years of silence, and *That Long Silence* tells the story of a woman who

keeps silent all her life. The novel ends with the female protagonist's sudden decision to speak up, to let her voice be heard. It is a sensitive dramatization of married life, centering on the inner perception of a woman who is subtly drawn from inside, a woman that finds the routine of her life so disrupted that for the first time she can retrospectively look at her life and thus attempt to decide who she really is. Shashi Deshpande's silent figures, sometimes belonging to the same group of women who have to work as housemaids to earn their living, make many observations made by critics like Said in a different context particularly significant.

Edward Said's suggestion that Jane Austin's novels should be read contrapuntally also applies to the Indian author. It means that a number of elements which problematize the construction of the subjectivities of such women in terms of illiteracy, ideological brainwashing in patriarchal societal structures, the problem of dowry, the complexity of the issues of caste, economic status, will also have to be taken into account. It is a kind of reading that will then deconstruct the assumed uniformity of Said's Orient, reminding us that his questions regarding the consolidating vision of the novelist will have to be asked in the postcolonial context too, lest we forget that simple binaries do not exist.

Chapter Eight: *Paradigms of Identity in Nadine Gordimer's "Burger's Daughter"* also touches upon the theme of feminism, alluding to the behavior of women who exceed permissible limits in a cloistered society, a theme that is also not unusual in Nadine Gordimer's work. Among her female characters with a distinctive touch of character and an almost anguished desire to decide for themselves, is Rosa Burger, the protagonist of *Burger's Daughter*. Nadine Gordimer's work cannot be separated from the socio-political context of South Africa, and we considered it necessary to contribute a concise portrait of the "rainbow nation". The vision put forward by Gordimer is macroscopic, attentive to detail, and subjective. The novel focuses on the paradigms of the identity crisis experienced by the protagonist, and we are interested mainly in the deconstruction of identity. Forced to examine her position following a reversal of power, Rosa launches into a process of self-learning taking place in direct opposition to the established powers, within the romantic world.

The narrative of *Burger's Daughter* is multiple. The point of view alternates between an omniscient narrator, the integration of official reports and a narration to the "I" from Rosa's point of view. If identity and self-knowledge are the result of an interpretation, the subject must

be involved in the interpretation. In Rosa's case, however, mediation is based on the comments of others. Therefore we considered it necessary to discuss her progress on the background of the ongoing (postcolonial) debate on hybridity, the key to the constitution of cultural identity. Rosa is struggling with a hybrid and elusive identity. The fracture of the personal identity of the heroine becomes a reflection of the collective identity crisis in South Africa. Torn between two influences or two affiliations, Rosa finds herself in a position of discomfort and in-between where borders become the focus, and the world becomes confused. *Burger's Daughter* allows us to enter the world of apartheid, but, beyond the historical testimony of South Africa, this novel also evokes a lot of issues that go beyond the scope of a nation and that have a universal resonance: the relationship between spiritual values and the temporal world for example, the price of action and resignation, life and death. On the other hand, the use of an imaginary body allows Gordimer's writing to escape the rigor of the population categories imposed by South African law and makes permeability possible between ethnic categories. Thus, the heroine evolving in this environment must confront the over-determination of her social identity and the constructed character of this fixed identity.

The analysis of Nadine Gordimer's novels shows how literary productions, inserted in social and historical structures, go beyond the individual and aesthetic idiosyncrasies of each author. The representation of female characters shows either overcoming problems, or self-exile, coping with the transnational diaspora (which gives them opportunity to grow up) or freedom from oppressive family situations. Although on an individual level the representation of success is in sight, the ambiguity of the situation is perceived in the situation of the majority that remained.

Chapter Nine: *From a Utopian Past to a Dystopian Present* is a personal analysis of Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and aims to trigger a discussion on the condition of the modern woman—a major issue for the contemporary women novelists. Considering the particular nature of the novel—at the same time a dystopia and a feminist novel—we have viewed it from different angles: its dystopian inner structure, its positioning along the dystopian literary tradition, the focus on the corruptive power of subversion, the use of intertextuality and metanarrative, and its specificity and universality. In Margaret Atwood's novel, the not-so-distant past is not only controlled: any memories of it are black-listed, forbidden, and completely eliminated from the moral education of the younger generations who undergo a process of

brainwashing and programming to accept the norms of the new society. Talking about her novel, Atwood prefers to call it “speculative fiction”, despite the obvious elements of SF it contains, and she enumerates, among its defining elements: the importance of money, the social value of clothing, controlled sexual relations, access to power, and retribution for violating the law. Margaret Atwood painted in gloomy colours a world in which the violence of Christian theocracy and sexual discrimination reached a grim apogee, which deprived women of most of their rights and freedoms.

Margaret Atwood is claimed by various feminist movements because, first of all, she builds extremely strong female characters who, despite the extreme conditions and lack of freedom, still retain their personality or at least part of it. Secondly, through the fictional creation of a society in which a woman is considered an object, she actually militates for freedom, she pushes the lack of freedom to the extreme, in order to emphasize the importance of freedom, and turns women and men into instruments to show how important individuality really is. The great merit of *The Handmaid's Tale* is to explore with great lucidity the relationship between power, corruption and subversion and remind us very opportunely that artistic creation remains the best solution against totalitarian regimes.

On the other hand, by using the process of intertextuality, Margaret Atwood constantly calls on the collaboration of readers. References, or intertextual links, with the founding texts are often implicit and require the knowledge of these stories. In addition, the author ensures that the narrator can appeal directly to the narratee. As we propose to demonstrate, the insertion of this meta-narrative is most significant in Atwood's novel: the place of action is analogous and there are several similarities between the characters. In addition, the oppressive practices portrayed by the traditional and puritanical society described by Hawthorne are central to the story of *The Handmaid's Tale*. So we find in the three texts the same objectification of the woman as a uterus or reproductive. This objectification finds its origin in the Gospel, or rather, in its use by the Judeo-Christian religions. The postmodern, feminist view of the story of *The Handmaid's Tale* is a critique of the patriarchal, puritanical society described by Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. Margaret Atwood also strongly calls for Hawthorne's text, which we can call meta-narrative, as an intertextual reference. From the two novels, the attentive reader can easily establish correspondences between the literary contents.

Concluding Remarks: *Is Feminism a Postcolonial Development?* resumes the main tenets of postcolonial and feminist theories, reiterates the connection between the two and underlines the essential features in the three countries that make up our “postcolonial triangle”: India, South Africa, and Canada. What each of these literatures have in common, apart from their special and distinct regional characteristics, is that they have emerged in their present form from the experience of colonization and have been asserted by thematizing the tension with imperial power and emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial center.

Feminism in the West emerged as a powerful challenge to the already existing power structures and gender equality at the level of family, economy and politics. However, the term still does not evoke such positive connotations in India. Most of those men and women who fought valiantly for women’s rights in India did not feel the need to use the term to express their ideas. In addition, many Indian activists argue that feminism, as defined by the West, has often become a tool of cultural imperialism. The South African feminist movement suffers from the legacy of segregation struggles that continue to emphasize class and race, to the detriment of equality, and it seeks to renew itself, tracking the gaps in an extremely patriarchal present. The works dealing with ambiguities and complexities of the genre in the South African culture relate to the relations between race, class and gender, representations of women’s or gender relations in literature, the reconstruction of feminist theory in the post-apartheid context, gender and health issues and the role of State. In Canada, there is a plurality of positions on subjects such as the place of women in society, motherhood, sexuality, equality with men and silence, among others. The first feminism claimed the rights of women, especially the right to vote. Egalitarian feminism is action-oriented with a specific political plan while feminism of difference is more philosophical feminism.

Each of the three women writers that we selected for our dissertation fit, more or less, in the pattern of the feminist dimension of the postcolonial triangle that we envisage as a metaphor of the women’s own approach and understanding of the condition of their own kind in the male-dominated, patriarchal society: whether their approach is simply personal, rooted in the traditions and customs of the country (Shashi Deshpande), political, with a strong implication in the inner struggles for liberation from Apartheid (Nadine Gordimer), or a fictionalized dystopia (Margaret

Atwood), all of them successfully respond to the preoccupation of the contemporary woman to make herself visible and assert her own rights.