

THE PRESENCE OF WOMAN IN ANDREE CHEDID'S NOVELS

by

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(Under the direction of Nina Hellerstein)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the Condition and Role of the Middle Eastern Woman in relation to her familial and societal roles. The themes of family and societal roles, War, death, and Maternity are examined to show the problems the Middle Eastern Woman faces and how she deals with such problems.

INDEX WORDS: Middle Eastern Woman, War, Maternity, Condition and Role

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late father, Buck Flowers.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The presence of woman, notably the Middle Eastern woman, in Andrée Chédid's novels is a prominent theme which may be examined through Chédid's portrayal of the woman's condition, her familial and societal roles, how she responds to adversities such as war and death, and the role maternity plays in the woman's story. The Arab woman in Chédid's novels is faced with various conflicts, both internal and external. The problems facing women in Chédid's novels and how each woman responds to such problems will be identified and examined in this thesis. It is important to understand the problems that Middle Eastern women face and how these problems are communicated in Chédid's literature because even though the characters face problems specific to their culture, other readers can identify with their situation.

The condition and role of woman serve as the common denominator unifying Chédid's female characters in their



familial and societal roles. In each of Chédid's stories, the female feels unhappy or unfulfilled. The female characters in Chédid's novels belong to a patriarchal society, wherein their role is to serve man and provide him with offspring. There is thus no need for a woman to learn to read or write. The woman is at the mercy of the man. She is often confined to a small apartment with little, if any, freedom.

In Le Sommeil délivré, Samya is paralyzed and therefore is of no use to either her husband, Boutros, nor her sister-in-law, Rachida, who lives with them. Boutros, Rachida, and the narrator refer to Samya as "la paralytique". "La malade ne les accompagnait jamais. Une chaise roulante aurait été une dépense inutile. A quoi bon? Ils étaient mieux ainsi, sans elle" (20). Samya has failed to fulfill her marital duty of providing Boutros with a male heir. The reader is continually reminded in the first chapter of Le Sommeil délivré that Samya is useless like her legs. "Samya's psyche is the prototype of the Arab woman's, enslaved by husband and society. Misunderstood, subservient to the man's needs, Samya lived in her own muted domain. . ." (Knapp 15).

Another example of the woman's condition in Le Sommeil délivré is when the village women "crient pour se donner de

l'importance avant l'arrivée des hommes" (32). It is evident in this passage that the women feel the need to dominate the children because of their own subordinate role in the patriarchal society to which they belong. It is uniquely in the husband's absence, that the wife is free to tell the children what to do.

In examining the individual female characters' situations, it becomes evident that these women are not content to follow in the footsteps of their mothers. They are different, defiant. The women in Chédid's novels actively pursue freedom. Freedom for each female character is different, yet as women they are united. Freedom may be the absence of male domination in Le Sommeil délivré and La Maison sans racines, or freedom from war or religious persecution in Le Sixième jour and Les Marches de sable.

The problems that Arab women face in Chédid's novels, are everyday problems that given any moment in time, could be experienced by fellow Arab women. The condition and role of woman is not only a common denominator to all Arab women, but it also evokes some aspects of women's condition in many cultures.

Le Sommeil délivré captures not only one woman's world but that of all women, whether living cloistered and closeted in a Middle Eastern land

or liberated to all intents and purposes in a modern metropolis yet still imprisoned within their own psychological worlds. (Knapp 15)

The female characters in Chédid's novels, La Maison sans racines and Les Marches de sable, are confronted with war and death. In these two novels, Chédid exposes the problems that the female protagonists face as a result of war and how they respond to these problems. The reader witnesses the destruction of the characters and how they put the pieces of their lives back together. Despite the violence these women face, each woman is in search of peace.

Chédid writes about war not primarily by describing scenes of combat but by showing its victims--characters whose lives are altered, destroyed or ended by the hatred which motivates others to commit acts of violence in the name of clans or religion. (Mann)

In La Maison sans racines, two friends, Myriam and Ammal, one Christian, the other Muslim, unite in an effort to bring peace to their divided country, Lebanon. "Amies depuis l'enfance, rien ne parviendra à faire d'Ammal et de Myriam des ennemies. Rien. Avant l'aube, chacune d'elles quittera sa maison pour aller vers cette rencontre" (57).

Against all odds, Ammal and Myriam will undertake a peaceful demonstration in hopes of unifying their countrymen. La Maison sans racines "shows women's positive role in the war, their efforts to bring peace and to reconcile enemy clans. Their initiative goes along with revolting against the traditional roles society prescribes for them" ("Andrée Chédid" 79).

In Les Marches de sable, Athanasia and her family seek refuge in the desert to escape paganism. Civil unrest has already claimed the life of her youngest son, Rufin. "Elle hait cette folie des hommes mal taillés pour la paix et qui n'aspirent qu'aux massacres" (75). It is in the desert that Athanasia is able to come to terms with the life she once led, thus permitting her to go forward. Micheline Tison-Braun remarks that in Chédid's fiction, the desert "is both a shelter and proving ground: one enters it to escape humanity. There one is confronted with oneself, achieving either serenity or madness" (95).

The manner in which Chédid treats war allows readers from different cultural backgrounds to empathize with Myriam, Ammal, and Athanasia even if the reader has not personally experienced war. "Beirut becomes the sum of all other cities. . .destroyed by war throughout history, of

all the prisoners, of all the fields filled up with corpses" (Andrée Chédid, Accad 81).

The theme of maternity is present in Le Sommeil délivré, Le Sixième jour, and Les Marches de sable. It is important to explore maternity because it is a complex and multilayered part of the female experience which adds another significant dimension to her interpretation of this experience.

In Le Sommeil délivré, infertility, and its social implications, is one of the two maternal problems confronting the female protagonist. Samya remains childless until the age of twenty-four. The women of the village began to shun her because "Elles n'aimaient pas les femmes stériles" (129). The other maternal problem confronting Samya is the fact that, to her husband's disappointment, she gives birth to a girl. During the interview with Samya's family, her father tells Boutros that she is "Bâtie comme un arbre. Elle n'aura que des garçons!" (91).

Despite the maternal problems faced by the protagonist, it is the birth of her baby girl that makes Samya feel alive. "Je n'étais plus seule. J'étais comme dénouée" (178). The infant girl, Mia, makes Samya feel happy and fulfilled for the first time in her life, and

mother and daughter develop their own language that no one else can understand.

In Le Sixième jour, Om-Hassan lives solely for her grandson, having lost her daughter to cholera. "Toi, tu es mon soleil. Tu es ma vie. Tu ne peux pas mourir. La vie ne peut pas mourir" (58). The young boy succumbs to cholera but not before his grandmother does everything in her power to save him. On the sixth day, when Om-Hassan learns that cholera has at last taken her grandson from her, she too dies.

In Les Marches de sable, Athanasia loses both of her children as a result of religious conflict, but she gets a second chance at motherhood when she meets Cyre, a thirteen-year-old orphan girl. "Ces derniers jours, Athanasia a retrouvé pour elle certains gestes qu'elle avait pour ses enfants. Elle s'inquiète de son avenir" (181).

The condition and role of woman, war and death, and maternity are central themes in the Middle Eastern woman's life. Each of these themes are present in Chédid's novels wherein a woman's condition and role are interlinked with war, death, and maternity. In order to understand the problems that the Arab woman faces, it is essential to analyze each of these themes and how they are connected.

Chédid's female protagonists open the reader's eyes to these problems and set an example through their actions for other women in the world who are suffering from oppression.

## Chapter 2

### The condition and role of woman

The condition of the Arab woman and her familial and societal roles in a patriarchal society are issues addressed by Andrée Chédid in her novels, Le Sommeil, Délivré, La maison sans racines, and Le Sixième Jour. "The term role is used as a constellation of rights and obligations held by one person vis-à-vis the other members of his or her household" (Allman 270). The Middle Eastern woman's role in family and society is that of wife and mother. The woman's role as wife and mother, the education of women, and woman's inferior status pose problems for Chédid's female protagonists. The problems woman faces in Chédid's novels are interdependent. Marriage and education are contributing factors to the Arab woman's inferior status. It is important to examine these problematic issues independently and perhaps more importantly to see how they work together as a whole within the context of a patriarchal society.



A patriarchal society consists of a dominant male figure and one or more subordinate female figures. "In classic patriarchy, the senior man has authority over everyone else in the family, including younger men, and women are subject to distinct forms of control and subordination" (Shukri 35). The roles of woman and man are clearly defined. "A woman fulfills her functions by being a wife and a mother, while a man is to be the undisputed authority, the breadwinner and the active member in public life" (Shukri 35). Not all of the female protagonists in Chédid's novels fulfill the duties required of a wife and mother. The female protagonists confront the male figure in their respective lives in different ways.

A dominant male figure is central to a patriarchal society. "Men are entrusted with safeguarding family honor through their control over female members; they are backed by complex social arrangements that ensure the protection- and dependence-of women" (Moghadam 108). Examples of male domination may be found in La Maison sans racines and Le Sommeil délivré, and Le Sixième jour. In this chapter, the relationship between male domination and woman's role and condition will be analyzed in terms of the experiences of the oppressed female characters. The dominant male figure controls the role of the woman as wife and mother and her

education, thus contributing to her overall inferior status.

In a 1991 interview with Lebanese critic Alīs Sallūm, Andrée Chédid says that the story of the oppressed woman in her novels is "the actualization of a human cry that lives within me, and perhaps this cry is there to represent the Arab woman's voice. . . . I lived my childhood in Egypt, and I saw examples of this oppressed woman" (Amoia 152). The oppressed female in Chédid's novels rejects the social customs of the Middle East.

For example, Myriam, in La Maison sans racines, confronts her brother Georges who tries to control her. He feels entitled to know about her whereabouts and with whom she spends her time. As her brother, Georges assumes the role of dominant male. "Des siècles de pères, de frères, d'époux, gardiens de l'honneur, avaient toujours encerclé, protégé mères, sœurs, femmes et filles. Chez Georges, ces tendances étaient innées, il ne voulait même pas qu'on en discutât" (111). One evening when Myriam returns home late, Georges seizes her by the arm demanding that she tell him where she has been. Myriam says that she has nothing to tell him. She rushes out of the apartment and closes the door behind her. Despite Georges' aggressive behaviors that are, according to Myriam, "aussi violentes que surannées",

she does not give in to him (112). By refusing to answer her brother's questions about her whereabouts, Myriam is openly rejecting his authority. Myriam tells herself "jamais elle ne permettrait à Georges d'entraver ses désirs, de contrecarrer ses projets, de changer sa manière de voir" (142). This passage is indicative of Myriam's desire for change in her life.

It is evident that Georges does not like the rebellious nature of his sister. He is frustrated by her non-conformity. Il "n'approuvait aucun des comportements de sa sœur. A son avis, celle-ci se mêlait de ce qui ne regardait pas les femmes" (111). This passage shows that Georges believes in the structure of the patriarchal society. Myriam, however, continually challenges her brother's authority. Even if Georges is effective in controlling Myriam from time to time, she will not allow him to take her dreams from her. He attempts to control her actions but he will never control her thoughts.

Another example of the female's opposition to male dominance is found in La Maison sans racines, Kalya, at a very early age, stands up to her great uncle, Farid, who is "tyrannique et brouillon, irascible. . ." (41). Farid is the stereotypical Middle Eastern male who likes to dominate his wife, Odette. He exercises "sa domination sur celle-ci,

sur les domestiques; et, plus tard, sur ses cinq enfants” (44). In the restaurant when the owner neglects to come over to greet Farid, he redirects his anger to Odette. Kalya notices that Odette accepts his comments and since Odette does not stand up to Farid, Kalya takes it upon herself to stand up to her great uncle. Kalya’s grandmother and aunt are shocked by her behavior. They are accustomed to Farid’s behavior and accept it for what it is. Odette does not express discontent when her husband treats her poorly. Kalya, on the other hand, is revolted by the way her great uncle treats her aunt. This situation motivates Kalya to cross the subordinate female/dominant male boundary, and influences the lifestyle choices she makes as an adult to avoid male oppression. She decides to live in Paris and be a photographer, because Paris symbolizes freedom. She remembers that as a child, when she was vacationing in Paris with her grandmother, Nouza, she did not want to leave. “J’avais le sentiment qu’on nous arrachait notre respiration, notre liberté” (159).

Marriage within the context of a patriarchal society is a multilayered problem for the Middle Eastern woman in Chédid’s novels, Le Sommeil délivré and Le Sixième jour. First, the woman does not choose her husband. She is merely passed from a controlling father to a controlling husband.

Secondly, she is expected to fulfill the duties of wife and mother and little else. The experiences of the female protagonists in Chédid's novels, provide insight into the psychological effects an arranged marriage has on the Arab woman.

In Le Sommeil délivré, when Samya's brother tells her father that he has decided to marry, Samya's father advises his son "il faut prendre une femme jeune, pour la former" (65). This passage explains the dominant male's point of view about marriage. Samya's father does not see the wife as a partner in the marriage but rather as a servant to her husband. When Samya's brothers tell their father that their cousins are ashamed of their sister, Souraya, because she has not married, Samya's father suggests that "il n'y a pas de chef dans cette maison" (66). Samya's father is convinced that her cousin's father is not exercising his control over his wife and daughter. Samya's father tells her that he would never allow a similar situation under his roof. The opinions of Samya's father and brothers illustrate two very important requirements for marriage in a patriarchal society: the desire for a daughter to be married at a young age and the need for a dominant male. Meriwether concludes that "a woman who gets married at a young age is of high value to her husband, and as she

becomes older, her value declines" (194). Arab women are historically regarded as property of the head of the household. Samya is the only daughter. She is a financial burden to her father and brothers. She says "J'encombrais, je coûtai. Il fallait me marier au plus vite" (82). This passage reveals how Samya perceives herself within her family. When the time comes for Samya to marry, her father chooses a forty-five year old man for Samya, thirteen. Samya asks to speak to her father and she tells him "je n'ai pas su répondre. . ." in reply to the man's proposal (84). Samya is naïve enough to think that she has a choice. At thirteen, she does not yet understand how marriage works in a patriarchal society. Her father tells her that she has to marry as soon as possible because the family business is in financial ruin and if she does not marry before people find out, it will be impossible to find a husband and "Tu nous resterais sur les bras!" (85). The father's comment reiterates that the wife is the property of the husband. She has little value outside of her role as wife and mother. Samya recalls that when she was in boarding school, she was expected to follow orders and obey the commands of the nuns. As a married woman, she is expected to follow her husband's orders and obey his commands.

The day of Samya's marriage, she recalls the priest giving his blessing "avec des mots qui enchaînaient éternellement" (106). Samya feels enslaved to Boutros. She will never be free. She is in this marriage until death do she and Boutros part. Samya is "forcée dans un mariage malheureux, emprisonnée dans des coutumes qui l'asphyxient petit à petit" (Accad 103). She does not have the luxury of falling in love. She has never experienced love. She has only experienced oppression, that of her father and then Boutros. Boutros does not allow Samya to make any changes to the house. When she asks the servant to replace the plastic flowers with live ones, Boutros is furious. He asks her "Est-ce une insulte à moi et à Sit Rachida, vaurien?" (120). Boutros speaks to Samya in the same manner he speaks to the household servant. Boutros forbids Samya to go to the village center alone after he finds out that she has talked to some of the village women there. He says to Samya, "Plus de visite seule au village. Il faut tenir son rang" (140). Samya and her daughter have no social life since they are confined to the house and isolated from the village women. Samya's daughter, Mia, is six years old when Boutros finally gives Samya permission to "l'emmener en ville pour lui acheter des vêtements" (197). Boutros controls when and where they may go. The psychological

effect of Samya's cloistered existence manifests itself physically when she becomes paralyzed. Her paralysis is "a manifestation of her inability to cope with daily existence, the routine of her life; it is her form of rejection of her pariah state, of her excoriating pain" (Knapp 13). Samya is not paralyzed at the time of her marriage. Once she marries Boutros, she feels her life eroding away. Her legs respond by ceasing to function. "Mes jambes étaient complètement inertes. J'en avais chassé la vie" (216). Just as Boutros chases the life out of Samya, she chases the life out of her legs.

Le Sommeil délivré opens and closes with the fatal shooting of Boutros. The act of shooting Boutros is the ultimate refusal of male domination. For Samya, killing Boutros is the means to end a life of oppression. "Elle était maintenant plus loin qu'elle ne pourrait jamais aller. Un poids était tombé de sa poitrine, entraînant sa chambre et l'instant. Cette histoire n'était plus la sienne" (30). Shooting Boutros takes Samya farther away than she could ever walk. She no longer feels chained to this oppressed life. In the minutes following the shooting "Elle sentait qu'à cet instant, elle aurait pu se lever. Elles lui obéiraient ses jambes, elle le sentait" (30). This passage reiterates that Samya's paralysis is in



response to the oppression that no longer weighs her down. The narrator refers to her as the cripple prior to the shooting of her husband. Afterward, the narrator refers to Samya as the woman. "D'autres comme moi, ont dû sentir leur vie s'effriter au long d'une existence sans amour. Si je crie, je crie un peu pour elles" (122). Samya did this for all oppressed women. Her suffering is not in vain. Samya would rather accept the consequences of murdering her husband than continue to suffer as his wife. Samya does not care what happens to her now. She says "Je suis morte à cette histoire, et tout se tait en moi" (222)

In Le Sixième jour, when Om Hassan is a young girl, her father beats her because she refuses to marry the man he has chosen for her. Rather than come to her defense, her mother huddles in a corner. Om Hassan's mother respects her father's authority and role within the family. Om Hassan, on the other hand, refuses to follow her father's orders. "Malgré le père qui la menace à présent de sa houe, la mère qui tremble dans un coin, les voisins, le fiancé qui attend une réponse, elle ne cédera pas" (156). Om Hassan is not content to marry someone whom she does not love. By disobeying her father, Om Hassan is rejecting her role in the patriarchal society. She is questioning the boundaries between her dominant father and her inferior self.

In Le Sommeil délivré and La Maison sans racines the purpose of education in the Middle Eastern woman's life is addressed. Chédid communicates to the reader the value of an education for an Arab woman and also the problematic nature of woman's education for the dominant male figure. The male figures view the education of females as unnecessary given the fact that woman's only role is as wife and mother. The lack of education is significant because it contributes to the Arab woman's dependence on her husband. Conversely, an educated Arab woman who has learned to think for herself meets many conflicts with her familial and societal roles.

In Le Sommeil délivré, when Samya's brothers make fun of her compositions, her father tells her that she will need to marry soon. He says "Tant que tu pourras rédiger une lettre à ton vieux père pour lui annoncer la naissance d'un garçon, cela suffira" (50). After Samya marries Boutros, she makes up happy stories about being a bride to tell the village woman who delivers fresh vegetables to her daily. Samya tells her that Boutros first saw her at boarding school. The village woman then asks if Samya knows how to read and write. When Samya says yes, the village woman asks "Ce n'est pas pour t'offenser, mais à quoi cela va-t-il te servir?" (116). The village woman's comment

reminds Samya that her education will not serve her in her roles as wife and mother.

In La Maison sans racines, Myriam and her best friend, Ammal, attend the university. They go against their fathers and brothers who would prefer that they marry and have children. "Leurs familles les souhaitent mariées, établies, pourvues d'enfants, abandonnant des études qu'elles espèrent provisoires" (149). Their families permit them to study all the while hoping that they will abandon their studies in order to marry and start families. While their families do not forbid Myriam and Ammal to study, they do not think an education will serve them in what they believe to be the inevitable roles of wife and mother. Myriam and Ammal refuse a traditional marriage and put all of their energies into their professions. An education can provide Myriam and Ammal with the opportunity to change their familial and societal roles and to gain financial independence thus granting them the freedom to make their own life choices. Furthermore, Myriam and Ammal "dévorent livres, journaux. . ." quenching their thirst for knowledge. They are curious. "Elles veulent voir, savoir" (148). They desire to know more about the outside world and to better understand the one they live in (148). Ammal's veiled grandmother tells her: "Apprends autant que tu peux.

Vis. Moi, je n'ai rien su. Je ne sais même pas si j'ai vécu" (149). The grandmother encourages Ammal to rebel against the limitations that she herself has had to accept, by taking advantage of the expansion of life experiences that is brought by learning and knowledge.

Myriam and Ammal do not want to be like "ces mères trop passives ou trop remuantes, qui dilapident leur existence oisive entre somnolence ou mondanités" (149). They want to be independent, and do not want to live cloistered in an apartment like their mothers. They want to experience life. Myriam and Ammal "vivent passionnément, difficilement, entre liberté et tabous" (149).

In Chédid's Le Sommeil Délivré, La maison sans racines, and Le Sixième Jour, the female protagonists are continually confronted with their subordinate roles as wife, mother, or daughter in a patriarchal society. Chédid launches the female characters into situations where they must come to terms with their inferior status. The female characters open doors that were previously closed to them by the dominant male figure. It is in confronting fathers and brothers that the female character is able to measure her self-worth.

## Chapter 3

### War

In La Maison sans racines and Les Marches de sable, Chédid's female protagonists are caught in a struggle between people of different religions who have been trying to coexist peacefully in the same country for hundreds of years. Chédid tells the story of social and religious conflict through the experience of the female protagonist.

In Chédid's works, it is characteristically women who, as a result of the suffering and loss they experience during war, join together and exhibit the generosity, initiative, and vision necessary to achieve peace. (Amoia 151)

Chédid's female protagonists in La Maison sans racines are symbols of peace and hope to a country torn apart by war.

In La Maison sans racines, the civil war takes place in Beirut in 1975 between Christians and Muslims. This time period reflects the actual civil war which decimated Lebanon from 1975 to 1990. The Lebanese civil war began as

a result of the conflicts and political compromises of Lebanon's colonial period and was exacerbated by the nation's changing demographic trends: Christian and Muslim inter-religious strife ("Lebanese"). Chédid describes the Lebanese people as "une population mixte, originaire de plusieurs communautés" whose "existences se sont toujours entremêlées" (56). In Liban, an essay written by Chédid in 1974, she describes the country as a "Land where opposed voices, confronting each other, do their best to remain harmonious" (6).

In Les Marches de sable, the war takes place in third or fourth century Egypt between Christians and Pagans "after the birth of Christ, when paganism was still alive but experiencing its death throes. . ." (Knapp 43). The conflict in Les Marches de sable reflects the Era of Martyrs which took place in the third or fourth century A.D. when the Romans began persecuting Christians. Chédid tells us that "les deux croyances-chrétienne et païenne-, rongées par des divisions internes, se côtoient pacifiquement, s'accommodant de leurs différences. . ." (56). The Christians and Pagans had experienced a somewhat peaceful cohabitation until "Soudain, elles s'emporent l'une contre l'autre" (56).

Chédid's choice of time period for La Maison sans racines and Les Marches de sable is interesting because one novel reflects a contemporary war while the other reflects a much earlier one. In an interview with Martine Leca, Chédid explains

If I only took my ideas from current events their range might be limited and they would fail to achieve a universal dimension. By bringing together the present and the distant past, myths are universal and open up avenues for exploring all the facets of human nature. (50)

Chédid chooses to explore war in different time periods in order to demonstrate its timelessness. War is universal as are its victims. Chédid's characters face similar problems in both novels. In Beirut or in Egypt, the devastating effects of war are timeless. For example, in La Maison sans racines, "Beyrouth devient la somme de toutes les villes détruites par la guerre au cours de l'histoire" (Aux Frontières 106).

In La Maison sans racines, the female protagonists find themselves surrounded by gunfire, kidnappings, and murder. Chédid describes "des explosions successives qui se déclenchèrent dans divers endroits de la capitale" (183). She remarks the overnight apparition of "Des armes de tous

calibres. . . les machines de guerre, chars d'assaut, jeeps porteuses de canon" in Beirut (207). Myriam and Ammal learn "qu'en pleine ville des hommes armés avaient stoppé un autocar, abattu une dizaine de passagers. . . d'autres avaient découvert les cadavres mutilés de cinq jeunes gens jetés au bas d'un talus" (139).

In Les Marches de sable, the Christians and the Pagans are destroying each others' places of worship: "Adeptes du Christ renversant les idoles, détruisant les temples. Adorateurs de Zeus, d'Amon ou d'Héraclès dévastant les lieux de prière, brûlant les images saintes" (56). Near the site where a mass execution of Christians takes place, "un pont traverse des canaux teintés de sang, qui charrient, depuis toute une saison, d'innombrables cadavres" (55). Pagans "s'acharneront sur les vierges, qu'ils insultent, violeront, exécuteront" (112).

Myriam, Ammal, Kalya, and Sybil in La Maison sans racines and Athanasia in Les Marches de sable all have one thing in common, they are victims of violence. Their lives are forever altered due to socio-religious conflict. For Myriam and Ammal, in La Maison sans racines, war pushes them to take steps toward a peaceful resolution. Kalya becomes involved in a socio-religious conflict she would rather avoid; a conflict that ultimately claims the life of



her granddaughter. Kalya lives outside of Lebanon and does not share the same interest in the war as Myriam and Ammal. She is removed from the conflict. In Les Marches de sable, war deprives Athanasia of her role as wife and mother, so she is left with the task of redefining her purpose in life.

La Maison sans racines symbolically opens and closes with Myriam, a Christian, and Ammal, a Muslim, in the city square, the place of conflict, in war-torn Beirut. Their story unifies the three storylines in the novel. This unification is symbolic of Myriam and Ammal's collective purpose in the novel: to end the violence in Beirut and bring Christians and Muslims together. Their friendship is an example of peace and understanding.

Myriam and Ammal are conscious of their society's injustices and are committed to changing them. They are motivated by the promise of change. Myriam and Ammal appear to be fearless despite the danger that surrounds them.

Georges' kidnapping reinforces Myriam and Ammal's desire to stop the violence. If they can find Georges, they believe they can make him understand their point of view. If Myriam can convince Georges that weapons are not necessary to establish peace, then she symbolically convinces every dominant male in the patriarchal society.

Face au danger, aux violences aveugles, les oppositions devaient s'effacer. Il fallait retrouver Georges coûte que coûte, le convaincre que ni les doctrines ni la religion ne devaient déterminer les rapports; que les luttes partisans étaient fatales, qu'il n'en résulterait qu'un engrenage désastreux. (208)

Myriam and Ammal desire to tear down the invisible wall separating the Christians and Muslims. They believe that their peace march will invite crowds of onlookers to the city square.

Ensuite tous redescendraient, massivement, vers la cité. Hors des appartenances, des clans, des catéchismes, des féodalités, des idéologies, leurs voix éveilleraient celles du silence, dissiperaient leurs peurs, changeraient ces paroles tues en une seule parole de concorde, de liberté. Une parole pour tous. (209)

Myriam and Ammal are convinced that through their actions, they can replace the violence in the square with peace. They think that their peace march will encourage people of both sides to dialogue about their differences realizing that they have a common interest.

The carefully choreographed peace march has Myriam and Ammal appear at the same time from different sides of the city square. "Parvenues, ensemble, au centre du rond-point, elles se tendront les mains, échangeront un baiser symbolique. Puis elles secoueront leurs écharpes, appelleront à haute voix tous ceux qui attendent autour" (57). Myriam and Ammal's symbolic kiss is where Christian meets Muslim. They shed their differences this day, uniting against violence. They are both wearing the same yellow clothes: "cette couleur éclatante qui exclut deuil et désolation" (57). Myriam and Ammal wish to be indistinguishable from one another "ainsi elles seront identiques, interchangeables" (57). The significance of the same clothing demonstrates to onlookers that despite their different religions "Ce matin, elles sont une, identiques" (14).

Kalya is one of many lookouts who "répercuteront la nouvelle. Celle-ci sera reprise, propagée de quartier en quartier par d'autres amis à l'affût" (57). Myriam tells Kalya:

notre message aura atteint des centaines de personnes. Il y aura un énorme rassemblement. Très vite la Place regorgera de gens. Ensuite, en foule, avant que des luttes fratricides ne

commencent, nous inonderons la ville comme un torrent. (210)

Myriam and Ammal expect their peace march to unite people well beyond the city square. They believe that there are others who share their ideals but are afraid to come forward.

Kalya is reluctant to carry a gun to the city square because she does not wish to participate in the violence. As she approaches Myriam and Ammal, Kalya "tient l'arme bien en vue pour décourager une autre menace" (Aux Frontières 105). It is ironic that Kalya carries a gun given to her by Georges. He tells Kalya: "Des belles idées ne suffisent pas, rassembler des gens différents dans un même endroit crée la haine" (199). He believes in war and the necessity of weapons.

Gun in hand, "Kalya avance elle ne sait vers quoi" (98). She is uncertain if she is walking toward life or death, walking forward or backward in time. "Kalya avance comme si elle marchait depuis toujours. Elle avance, pas à pas, depuis des éternités, au fond d'un immense vide" (117). Evelyne Accad explains that Kalya's walk recalls other walks of other women throughout the ages (Aux Frontières 105). "Des corps douloureux, venus de tous les siècles, de tous les coins de la terre, surgissent autour

d'elle" (117). Kalya is universal. She is strong and despite her fears, she marches forward. She represents every woman who has ever been affected by war. She "becomes the archetypal figure of all women, giver of life, bearer of humanity's suffering" (Amyuni).

Unfortunately, a sniper rejects Myriam and Ammal's message of peace. "Sous les deux corps, soudés l'un à l'autre, s'étalait, une nappe de sang aux bords déchiquetés. De cette masse un cri s'éleva, aigu, déchirant. Puis ce fut le silence" (19). Myriam and Ammal are still one, the sniper is unable to divide them. Injured, they are indistinguishable from one another.

Il fallait sauver ce que Myriam et Ammal avaient partagé; maintenir cet espoir qu'elles voulaient porter, ensemble, jusqu'au centre de la Place, où devaient bientôt converger les diverses communautés de la ville. Sauver cette rencontre préparée depuis des jours. (17)

Despite their wounds, "touchées ensemble, elles guériraient ensemble, plus liées, plus décidées que jamais" (228). They will be able to continue their struggle for peace and change. Myriam and Ammal are even more committed to their cause than before. Symbolically, the novel ends with the image of the blood-stained, yellow scarf evoking

the image of Myriam and Ammal forging on, stronger than ever, toward a new Lebanon:

Harcelée par la brise, l'écharpe jaune, maculée de sang, garde dans ses plis la clarté tenace du matin. Le morceau d'étoffe s'élève, s'enfle, se rabat, rejaillit, s'élançe, flotte; retombe à nouveau et s'envole de plus belle. . . (248)

Evelyne Accad explains that even though the peace march appears to have failed, it continues to thrive symbolically (Aux Frontières 114). Myriam and Ammal's message of peace will spread and their courage will continue to inspire others who share their vision.

Incidentally, Kalya's granddaughter, Sybil, is exposed to violence for the first time in her life when Aziz is killed. Despite her encounter with such violence, Sybil still loves the country of her ancestors. Like Myriam and Ammal, Sybil is the victim of a sniper who rejects the hope she symbolizes. Evelyne Accad explains the symbolic death of Sybil as an image of Lebanon. She is the metaphoric child victimized by war (Des Femmes 101).

In Les Marches de sable, Paganism is fading so the Pagans are persecuting Christians. Athanasia, a Christian convert, seeks shelter in the desert. "Elle hurla contre les combats, les massacres, les luttes sanglantes et

fratricides" (145). This passage reveals Athanasia's frustration with the violence.

Athanasia "voudrait que tout s'arrête" (69). She does not want to live. "Athanasia a perdu le goût du présent et de l'avenir" (69). She loses all hope for her present and future. Without her family, Athanasia has nothing to live for. The only thing that keeps her going is the hope that she will one day be reunited with Andros and Antoine. "Une lueur obstinée s'éveillera, et durant des années elle n'aura que cette clarté ténue pour la tenir debout" (70).

Athanasia's disguise as a hermit is symbolic of the internal and external changes she is experiencing. "L'âge, la souffrance l'avaient marquée, elle prit le nom d'Isma" (71). Her new name, Isma, symbolizes the changes Athanasia undergoes in the desert.

The desert "poursuivit son travail d'érosion. Les traits de plus en plus charpentés, la voix de plus en plus éraillée, Athanasia devenait méconnaissable" (71). The physical changes Athanasia undergoes in the desert contribute to her transformation. The desert has disfigured her face. This is the physical manifestation of the psychological changes Athanasia undergoes on her journey.

The fact that Athanasia chooses not to reveal her identity to Andros reflects the psychological changes she

is going through. She is a different person now and she is continually evolving. When Andros dies, it is as if Athanasia's former self dies too. This time "l'absence est, cette fois, totale. La solitude, absolue" (75). Andros' death frees Athanasia to continue her journey.

Elle n'est plus que cela: une femme en deuil de son amour. Le reste s'efface: tous ses passés, tout l'avenir. Noyée dans ce malheur, cent fois imaginé et pourtant unimaginable, plus rien n'a de réalité pour Athanasia. (80)

Athanasia must start over again. She walks aimlessly in the desert. She is like a lump of clay that is continually being formed and shaped by the desert environment. It is as if every emotion is being drained from her body only to be replaced with new ones. "Sa tête est vide; même les sanglots l'ont quittée. Elle marche sans savoir, où ses pas la mènent; elle s'enfonce dans cette étendue vacante, démesurée" (76). However, she has not given up hope. "En dépit de l'horreur et du désespoir, Athanasia ne croit, n'espère qu'en la vie. Cette vie qui ne cesse de se hisser à travers les obstacles, d'apparaître à chaque battement, à chaque regard" (85).

Isolation in the desert and separation from her family cause Athanasia to question God. Elle "repousse



Dieu, rejette l'âme. Elle vomit l'âme!" (75). It is ironic that Athanasia flees the city to preserve a religion that she no longer believes in.

Athanasia's sojourn in the desert proves cathartic for her. "Although numbing, the isolation in the desert's spacelessness proves productive for Athanasia" (Knapp 44). She is forced to think about her life and what she will do with what is left of it. It is in the desert that Athanasia discovers "the source of new life" (Knapp 45). This isolation enables her to let go of her happy past and embrace a different future without her family.

When Marie and Cyre help Athanasia bury Andros, it symbolizes the closing of one chapter in Athanasia's life and the beginning of a new one with them. Cyre is particularly instrumental in Athanasia's transformation. She looks to Athanasia as a mother figure.

In an interview with Martine Leca, Chédid explains:

My characters go into the desert to lick their moral wounds. Athanasia, for example, the heroine of Les Marches de sable, thinks only of emerging from this ordeal in the desert, the crossing of which has purified and strengthened her. But the teaching of the desert is sterile if it is not

taken back to the city. After the desert, one has to return to the human world. (2)

Indeed, Athanasia returns to the human world. The novel opens with Athanasia and her family entering the desert and closes with Athanasia entering the front gate at a friend's house. She comes full circle in the novel. Having shed her former self, Athanasia emerges from the desert, transformed, ready to live in civilization again.

Like Kalya in La Maison sans racines, Athanasia is universal. She represents every woman who has ever experienced war. "Les gémissements des mères, les clameurs des femmes se déchaînaient dans sa voix" (145). As Kalya's walk represents the walks of other women victimized by war, so does Athanasia's walk in the desert. Athanasia's walk symbolizes the healing process that one goes through in the aftermath of such devastation.

In La Maison sans racines and Les Marches de sable, the female protagonists' lives are torn apart by social and religious conflict. Chédid explores the effects of war's destruction through the experiences of the female characters. Chédid's novels "illustrate the devastation that results from the desire for dominance in a deadly game where all are victims" (Amoia 151). In La Maison sans racines, the female characters live in a patriarchal

society where the men dominate the women. The socio-religious struggle depicted in Chédid's novel reflects this desire to dominate. In Les Marches de sable, the Christians and Pagans are fighting for control. Although the devastation of war falls upon all the members of these societies, Chédid uses her female characters to represent the most profound truths about its effects. Despite the sometimes agonizing obstacles the female protagonists face, the end result is that life continues and where there is life, there is hope.

## Chapter 4

### Maternity

The theme of maternity is present in Le Sommeil délivré, La Maison sans racines, Le Sixième jour, and Les Marches de sable. In Middle Eastern culture, "Childbearing is the central female labor activity" (Moghadam 105). However, Chédid treats maternity positively in her novels. Maternity liberates her female protagonists, and they embrace their role as mother or grandmother. In nurturing a child, the mother or grandmother finds fulfillment. Motherhood provides woman with the opportunity to love and be loved unconditionally. She is able to participate in and contribute to the child's development. Caring for the child enables the mother to evolve and satisfy her own emotional needs. Paradoxically, in a world that considers them to be little more than baby machines, Chédid's female characters gain access to a fuller form of humanity through childbearing. This function appears through two principal roles of the child in Chédid's novels: "il apparaît soit

comme un *rédempteur* (libérateur), soit comme un *alchimiste* (unificateur)" (Dotan-Robinet 154). For example, in Le Sommeil délivré, the child liberates the female protagonist and in Les Marches de sable, the presence of a child unifies the female characters.

Once the child's purpose has been fulfilled in the novel, the child dies. The mother's hopes and dreams for the child die as well, leaving her mentally and physically depleted.

Les enfants chédidien ont tous un rapport très intime avec la mort qu'Andrée Chédid expose de deux façons différentes: la mort naturelle, presque bienfaisante et la mort prématurée et tragique. (Dotan-Robinet 156)

However, this suffering plays a liberating role, since it pushes the heroine to search for meaning and become more actively involved in her destiny.

In Le Sommeil délivré, the continual surveillance and involvement of the village women in Samya's family status reflect society's expectations for the Middle Eastern female. The village women declare "Tu auras un fils! Aussi vrai que je te vois, tu auras un fils!" (127). They ask "Est-ce que ce sera un garçon pour notre bey? Ensuite, elles se découragèrent et essayèrent de m'éviter. Om el

Kher avait de la pitié dans la voix" (145). The village children question Samya's fertility as well. In the village, she hears children's voices behind her: "Cette fois, ça y est!" (148). Because of her infertility, the women avoid Samya because they fear something must be wrong with her. In the village: "Les yeux des femmes se fixaient sur ma poitrine, sur mon ventre. Elles devaient s'inquiéter de savoir si je portais déjà un enfant" (129). Samya is unable to walk about carefree in town without feeling the pressure of the village women's expectations. When Boutros forbids Samya to return to the village alone, she is somewhat relieved since she no longer feels welcome there. "J'étais stérile, l'on se méfiait des femmes stériles" (145).

Boutros' sister "dit que tout cela n'est pas normal. On nous a trompés sur ta santé. . ." (145). Boutros thinks that Samya is only good for one thing, to provide him with a son. Samya's father is in accord with Boutros: "On doit avoir un enfant!" (144). Boutros asks Samya "A quoi sers-tu si tu n'es même pas capable d'avoir un enfant?" (169). When Samya asks Boutros "Et, si c'était toi?" (169), she poses an unacceptable challenge: it would be unthinkable for Boutros to be infertile. Sterility would undermine his dominant familial role.

Despite the pressure to fulfill her familial and societal roles, Samya longs to have a child for herself. She is ashamed of her inability to conceive. "Il se mêlait en moi un sentiment de honte et d'angoisse" (145). It is not, however, to please Boutros that Samya wishes to have a child. "Ce n'était pas pour faire taire la voix de Boutros que je voulais un enfant. C'était un vrai désir, il ne me quittait plus" (146). A child represents freedom for Samya. "Je le voulais pour moi, je sentais qu'il m'ouvrirait à la vie. Je souhaitais aussi que cette naissance me rapprochât de ceux du village parce que je voulais leur sympathie" (167). She wants to have something in common with the women and to be accepted by them.

Samya confides in no one. "Lorsque je sus que j'attendais un enfant, je voulus d'abord en garder le secret" (171). As Mia grows in Samya's womb, Samya begins to grow. "The moments of bliss she knew as life began to grow within her were her own; they belonged to her; she possessed them" (Knapp 14). "Elle m'emplissait d'un sentiment si profond et si tendre, cette naissance, que je ne voulais, sur elle, aucune pensée qui pût lui porter atteinte" (171).

However, Samya's delight in motherhood is not shared by her in-laws since the child is not a boy. Rachida asks

herself "Comment annoncer à Boutros, le malheureux, que ce n'est pas un fils?" (178). She says "puisque ce n'est qu'une fille, vous n'avez pas besoin de moi!" (178). An infant girl is as useless to Boutros as Samya. Boutros regards Mia as just "another useless mouth to feed" (Knapp 14). Boutros believes that a daughter is a curse. He says "C'est à croire au châtement du ciel!" (146).

In spite of, and in contrast to, this familial reprobation, when Samya gives birth to Mia, she experiences freedom for the first time in her life. Mia functions as the "rédempteur". "C'était un vrai mot, ce mot de délivrance. Tout chantait en moi. J'avais le cerveau et le cœur délivrés. Je respirais en cadence" (176). It no longer matters that she is controlled by Boutros and confined to their home. She is free to love and be loved. "Je n'étais plus seule. J'étais comme dénouée. J'allais pouvoir aimer, me faire aimer à toute heure" (178).

For Samya, Mia's birth is symbolic of her own rebirth. "Ma tristesse se détachait de moi comme une peau morte" (183). "Avec Mia je retrouvais la vie" (183). Samya is given a second chance at life. "Je croyais ouvrir les yeux à Mia, et c'étaient les miens qui s'ouvraient aussi" (184). Samya sees the world through her child's eyes. Everything that is new to Mia is new to Samya. Mia and Samya share



every experience, excluding the other people around them. "As Mia grew, mother and child lived in close communion; they invented a language of their own that no outsider could decipher" (Knapp 14). Samya's symbolic rebirth is only possible because she has a daughter, not a son. Samya sees herself in Mia and is able to live through her.

When Mia dies, Samya's life seems to end as well. Samya refers to the morning of Mia's death as "le matin de ma vraie mort" (206). Samya finds herself alone again in the world. "J'étais seule. Ma raison de vivre, arrachée" (214). Anger and hatred for Boutros fill Samya's heart. She blames him for her suffering. Boutros' procrastination in calling the doctor, who could have saved the child, symbolizes his rejection of his daughter. If Mia had been a son, Boutros would no doubt have acted much sooner.

Samya's paralysis symbolizes her rejection of the physical world in which she no longer wishes to participate. "Je ne bougerais plus jamais. Je ne le voulais pas d'ailleurs" (218). Samya's life comes full circle. She is more unhappy and unfulfilled than ever, and the violent, but liberating, denouement of the novel is a necessary resolution of this crisis.

In La Maison sans racines, as Sybil runs through the square, Kalya admires her youth. "Le visage de Sybil la

traverse, lui sourit. Elle n'a jamais rien connu de plus clair, de plus vivant que ce visage" (120). In that moment, Sybil opens Kalya's eyes to what it means to live. Sybil functions as a liberator. Sybil's presence and example free Kalya from the violence around them.

A lifeline exists between Kalya and Sybil. "Kalya trace, presque malgré elle, un fil indélébile qui va, vient, de Sybil jusqu'à elle, et plus avant jusqu'aux jeunes femmes si dangereusement à découvert..." (78). There is an invisible line connecting Kalya to Sybil, Myriam, and Ammal. "Une ligne médiane va de l'immeuble jusqu'au centre de la Place, un sillon mène de Sybil jusqu'à Myriam et Ammal, un axe conduit la vie" (225). Kalya functions as the mother figure for Sybil, Myriam, and Ammal. She represents the giver of life.

As Kalya watches Sybil fall to the ground, "L'image fatale, irréversible, a gommé d'un coup sa propre vie" (247). When Sybil dies, it seems as if Kalya dies too. "Le cœur ne sait plus à quoi se retenir. . ." (247). Kalya is hopeless. "Elan et forces l'abandonnent" (247).

In death, Sybil becomes the grandmother and Kalya becomes the grandchild. Evelyne Accad suggests:

Les relations entre parents et enfants sont inversées; l'inversion souligne la dimension

cyclique du sens du temps chez Andrée Chédid, cette idée que l'histoire se répète et que la vie se renouvelle perpétuellement. (Aux Frontières 108)

Sybil is "une victime innocente des conflits humains, symbole de l'absurdité des rivalités et des guerres" (Dotan-Robinet 158). Sybil's death is a cry for help in a country that is being torn apart by socio-religious conflict.

In Le Sixième jour, Om Hassan's grandson, Hassan, is the "Fils de ma fille morte, fils de mon âme" (10). He "is her sole reason for existence; he is her soul, her very being; his young, evolving life must at all costs be nurtured and allowed to bloom and grow" (Knapp 21). Om Hassan tells him "Toi, tu es mon soleil. Tu es ma vie. Tu ne peux pas mourir. La vie ne peut pas mourir" (58). This passage reveals Om Hassan's physical and psychological dependence on her grandson. For Om Hassan, her grandson is the embodiment of her life. Like Samya and Athanasia, Om Hassan lives and dies emotionally depending on the welfare of her child.

The room in Om Hassan's nephew's house functions as a womb. Hassan's "life is to exist within the room/womb in its most elementary form—active in an inorganic state"

(Knapp 24). Chédid describes the room as being equipped with everything necessary when giving birth.

Dans la chambre, tout est en place: la cuve, le primus, un pain de savon, le batonnet qui sert à remuer le linge bouillant. Le mur blanc réverbère la lumière, le robinet étincelle: couleur d'or. Plus beau, plus vif que l'or, avec sa goutte d'eau suspendue. (74)

The water symbolizes the amniotic fluid which surrounds, protects and nourishes the fetus in the womb. "Psychologically speaking, water is linked with the female principle. Water is the transitional element, the mediator between life and death" (Knapp 25). Water is vital to the body's self-renewal. Comforted by the water, Om Hassan declares: "Nous sommes sauvés! Tu m'entends, petit, nous sommes sauvés!" (74). This passage reveals how Om Hassan perceives her physical self in relation to her grandson. She does not view Hassan as being separate from her physical self. If he is well, then she is well.

When Om Hassan's grandson dies, she wants to go to him but "ses jambes s'amollissent. Dans sa tête tout s'embrouille, les mots chevauchent, s'empêtrent. De sa bouche, il ne sort que des sons inarticulés" (182). The boatman "sent bien que la femme est morte de la mort de

l'enfant. Il ne faut même plus souhaiter qu'elle vive!" (183). As she is dying, the boatman tells her a lie so that she will die in peace, with hope for a future life: "L'enfant vit!" (185). In this way, the child, Hassan, plays the role of a liberator. His death frees Om Hassan to die.

Om Hassan represents every woman. She is not merely a grandmother. She is the archetypal mother. Om Hassan's love for her grandson is symbolic of maternal love.

Athanasia and Rufin, in Les Marches de sable, are another example of this intense mother-child relationship, in which the mother experiences both fulfillment and deep suffering. Athanasia witnesses the torturing of Rufin: "Les yeux absents, elle reste clouée sur place. Athanasia, belle, heureuse, devenue cette torche de douleurs, ce masque grisâtre, cette bouche trouée!" (55). Athanasia is helpless to save her child as his body is being torn apart limb by limb. She is unable to fulfill her maternal obligation to protect her child. Athanasia's inability to save her child causes her to break down mentally.

If only Rufin could see his mother one last time. "Cette seule image l'aurait aidé à triompher de la mort; à l'affronter sans gémissements" (65). Rufin wishes that he could "se réfugier pour quelques instants dans les bras

d'Athanasia! Redevenir, pour quelques instants, un enfant sur les genoux de sa mère" (65). These passages illustrate the loving relationship between mother and son.

Thémis comments on Athanasia's state of mind years after Rufin's death:

De nouveau, Athanasia porte Rufin dans son ventre... Mais ce n'est plus ce corps vivant, ce corps neuf qui palpitait dans ses flancs. Rufin n'est plus qu'un corps agrandi, immobile, un corps ensanglanté, qui se heurte aux organes de sa mère, se presse contre ses viscères bouscule son cœur, obstrue sa respiration. Un corps qui réclame son retour à l'existence. Jamais elle ne pourra l'expulser de sa vie! Athanasia n'est plus, cette fois, que le berceau d'un cadavre.

(114-15)

Psychologically, Athanasia carries Rufin with her wherever she roams. It is not the good memories that she remembers, rather those of his death. Rufin's memory is suffocating Athanasia. For as long as she lives, she will never be able to accept the way Rufin died.

Athanasia is universal. Like Samya, she embodies the pain and suffering of other women who have experienced the

loss of a child. "Les gémissements des mères, les clameurs des femmes se déchaînaient dans sa voix" (145).

Cyre functions as a liberator in Les Marches de sable. Her presence permits Athanasia to abandon, however briefly, her anguish. Athanasia takes the maternal feelings she has for her son and transfers them to Cyre. Cyre fulfills Athanasia's maternal needs. "Ces derniers jours, Athanasia a retrouvé pour elle certains gestes qu'elle avait pour ses enfants. Elle s'inquiète de son avenir" (181).

It is Athanasia's relationship with Cyre that enables her to begin the healing process. Cyre delivers Athanasia from her grief. "Depuis ces derniers jours, il me semblait qu'Athanasia était, peu à peu, retournée à sa véritable nature. Elle avait retrouvé son air tranquille. . . Elle s'oubliait de nouveau" (177). Athanasia begins to live again thanks to her maternal relationship with Cyre. Unable to express herself in words, Cyre looks at Athanasia and thinks to herself "Je serai ta fille dans le silence" (230). Before Cyre dies, she speaks to Athanasia who responds "Mon enfant, c'est bon de t'entendre" (237).

When Cyre dies, Athanasia and Pambô send her body down the river. This symbolizes Cyre's voyage to the afterlife. Water symbolizes renewal. Cyre's death is necessary for Athanasia to appreciate life. It is as if Cyre's life is

sacrificed for Athanasia's. Thanks to Athanasia's relationship with Cyre, she is ready to reconnect with humanity. "Entraîné par l'enfant, l'adulte redécouvre le contact avec l'autre, essence de vie" (Dotan-Robinet 156).

In Le Sommeil délivré, La Maison sans racines, Le Sixième jour, and Les Marches de sable, motherhood is a vital part of woman's psychological well-being. In exploring the relationship between mother and child, Chédid provides insight into another dimension of woman's psychological experience. The presence of a child in the female protagonist's life serves to liberate the characters in Chédid's novels in addition to creating an opportunity for the mother to grow emotionally.



## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

The presence of the Middle Eastern woman in Andrée Chédid's novels, Le Sommeil délivré, La Maison sans racines, Le Sixième jour, and Les Marches de sable is a predominant theme studied in this thesis by analyzing the Arab woman's condition, her familial and societal roles, her experience with war and death, and the role maternity plays in her life. Each of these tributary themes work together to contribute to the Middle Eastern woman's multidimensional experience.

The Middle Eastern woman's condition is influenced by her familial and societal roles which contribute to her oppressed state. In Chédid's novels, the female protagonists belong to a patriarchal society in which their role is that of an obedient wife and mother. Woman is dependant on the dominant male. Her dependency is insured by her lack of education and often isolated existence. Examples of such oppression are found in Le Sommeil

délivré, La Maison sans racines, and Le Sixième Jour. In the first novel, Samya is controlled by her father, brothers, and husband. Her family and society expect her to marry and have children. In the second novel, Myriam openly rejects the dominance of her brother. She and Ammal attend university and only wish to marry someone they love. In the third novel, Om Hassan's father beats her when she refuses to marry the man he has chosen for her.

The devastation of war and death contribute to the Arab woman's psychological condition in La Maison sans racines and Les Marches de sable. In the first novel, Myriam and Ammal struggle with past and present familial and societal roles for women in Lebanon. Their peace march is a rejection of such roles. Myriam and Ammal choose to peacefully confront the violence surrounding them. Their friendship is an example of the peaceful accord they wish to extend to fellow Muslims and Christians. Additionally, they seek to advance the much needed changes for women in their society. Despite being wounded, Myriam and Ammal's dream survives. They continue to bring hope to Lebanon. In the second novel, Athanasia undergoes a radical transformation as a result of the devastating effects of war and death. She is left both mentally and physically depleted as a result of the Pagan/Christian conflict.

Athanasia is like an empty vessel that is later replenished by her encounter with Cyre. Ironically, it is in the desert, a barren environment, that she rediscovers life. Her journey through the desert is symbolic of her rebirth. The desert delivers Athanasia from her suffering.

Maternity is thematically central to Le Sommeil délivré, La Maison sans racines, Le Sixième jour, and Les Marches de sable. Interestingly, Chédid treats maternity as a positive change in the Middle Eastern woman's life despite the common belief that childhood is nothing more than an obligation to family and society. In each novel, the child functions as the liberator. The child's life seems to be sacrificed for the mother or maternal figure.

In Le Sommeil délivré, Samya leads a life of oppression until the child (liberator) frees her. Mia's birth is symbolic of Samya's rebirth. Samya lives and dies emotionally with Mia. The depth of her suffering may be measured by her paralysis, the physical manifestation of her shattered psyche.

In La Maison sans racines, Kalya is the archetypal mother figure. The moment Myriam and Ammal are wounded, Kalya's maternal instinct to help them takes over. She risks her own life to be by their side. Additionally,

Kalya's relationship with her granddaughter enables her to deal with the death of her own grandmother.

In Le Sixième jour, Om Hassan lives vicariously through her grandson. He is her sole raison d'être. The maternal bond between Om Hassan and her grandson is so profound that when he dies, she dies too, in a kind of liberation from the suffering caused by the death of her daughter.

In Les Marches de sable, Athanasia is transformed by her maternal relationship with Cyre. It appears that she ceases to live after losing her two sons. Any feeling she has left is composed of grief and suffering. It is Athanasia's maternal relationship with Cyre that rekindles her maternal sentiments. The child (liberator) frees Athanasia from her dismal existence.

Chédid reveals the universality of each of her female protagonists. The characters in her novels represent every woman. Chédid not only unites her characters but her readers as well. A reader from a dissimilar background is still able to relate to Chédid's female protagonist on a psychological level. Myriam and Ammal symbolize the Christians and the Muslims they are trying to unite, and the potential peaceful union between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon. Myriam and Ammal represent every woman, while

Athanasia and Kalya represent every woman who has ever suffered from war and the death of a child.

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