Defiance of Docile Body: The Dynamics of the Female Body in Three Selected American Plays

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***Abstract**:*

Ever since the early writings of Aristotle, the female body has been negatively perceived and presented as defective, dangerous as well as man's property. Unfortunately, modern societies have not only embraced Aristotle's demeaning ideas about women's bodies, but put a powerful array of disciplinary practices that reinforced the notion of docile bodies in an attempt to control their lives. Therefore, this paper aims at exploring the dynamics of the female body in three American plays, namely, Miriam's Flowers (1988) by the Latina dramatist Migdalia Cruz, Foghorn (1973) by the native American Hanay Geiogamah and Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World (2012) by the Egyptian-American Yussef El Guindi. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: How is the female body presented in these plays? Do the female characters control their bodies to conform to cultural norms? How do they use their bodies to articulate their pain and resist oppression?

Key words: Docile- Female body- American plays- Foucault- Discipline- punish- Body art- sexuality- Latin culture- repression- recognition- pain- Native American- colonizer- Pocahontas- Egyptian- American – veil- weight

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الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة حول دينامية جسد المرأة في ثلاث مسرحيات أمريكية مختاره، وهي أزهار مريم للكاتبة اللاتينية ماجديليا كروز، والنفير للكاتب هاناى جيوجماه، والحاج موسى وشيري في العالم الجديد للكاتب المصرى الأمريكى يوسف الجندى. وتتناول هذه الدراسة الإجابة عن كيفية تناول جسد المرأة في هذه المسرحيات، وهل رضخت للمعايير الثقافية المهينة التى فرضت عليها منذ عهد أرسطو وحتى الآن؟ وكيف استخدمت جسدها للتعبير عن غضبها وآلامها ومقاومتها للقهر والقمع والاضطهاد؟

Introduction

This paper attempts to offer a feminist reading of three American plays, namely, *Miriam's flowers* (1988) by the Latina dramatist Migdalia Cruz, *Foghorn* (1973) by the Native American Hanay Geiogmah and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012) by the Egyptian-American Yussef El-Guindi. It also aims at exploring the dynamics of the female body in these dramatic texts reaffirming women's ability to use their bodies as an effective tool of resisting docility, articulating their pain and defying negative social values assigned to the female body. Michel Foucault's views in this respect will be used as the intellectual framework.

The term docile body was first introduced by the French social theorist Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1977). In this book he explains how disciplinary power targets the human body and deals with it as an object to be manipulated and trained. He states that these

disciplinary practices were first used in prisons, military establishments, hospitals, factories and schools but were gradually applied more broadly as techniques of social regulation and control. The key feature of disciplinary power is that it is exercised directly on the body. It subjects bodily activities to a process of constant surveillance and examination that enables a continuous and pervasive control of individual conduct. The purpose of these practices is to optimize the body's capacities, skills and productivity and to foster its usefulness and docility. He states:

> What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act on the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it . . . . Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced docile bodies. (138-9)

Foucault also adds that these disciplinary practices not only target the human body but the mind as well. In other words, the disciplinary power which is directed toward disciplining the body, takes hold of the mind to induce a psychological state of "conscious and permanent visibility" (Foucault 1977:201). He believes that the perpetual surveillance is internalized by individuals to produce the kind of self-awareness that defines the modern subject (Foucault 201).

Although Foucault makes few references to women or to the issue of gender in his writings, his treatment of the relations between

power, the body and sexuality has stimulated extensive feminist interest. They have found Foucault's contention that the body is the principal site of power in modern society useful in their explorations of the social control of women through their bodies and sexuality. For these feminists, women have always been determined as well as subjugated primarily through their bodies. Ever since the time of Aristotle, the female body has been negatively perceived and presented as defective, dangerous as well as man's property. Aristotle regarded the female body as "being afflicted with natural defectiveness"(De Beauvoir 16). They had also been called a "misbegotten male" (Teelon 11), "the other half" (Bailey 99) and the opposite against which the male could compare himself favorably. Their bodies had been measured and judged against the norm of man, the "active, strong and moral half of a human life" (Bailey 99) and any deviation from the male standard made them inferior.

Unfortunately, modern societies have continued to foster these negative ideas about the female body in an attempt to control their lives. In *The Politics of Women's Bodies* (2003) Rose Weitz condemns the way different societies propagate misconceptions about the female body in order to perpetuate both racial and sexual oppression. She writes:

> The social construction of women's bodies is the process through which ideas about women's bodies develop and become socially accepted. This is a political process, which reflects, reinforces, or

> challenges the distribution of power between men and women. The social construction of women's bodies often serves as a powerful tool for controlling women's lives by fostering material changes in women's lives and bodies. (ix)

Similarly, Susan Bordo in *Unbearable Weight: Western Culture and the Body* (1993) believes that the female body is reduced to a text of culture on which all cultural aspects of gender differences are reinforced. For these feminists, Foucault's ideas about the disciplinary practices and the docile body help in showing how different societies attempt to control women and limit their social and political role through their bodies. Although feminists have found Foucault's analysis of the relation between power and the body illuminating, they have drawn attention to its limitations. For instance, Nancy Fraser and Nancy Hartsock claim that Foucault's understanding of the subject as an effect of power threatens the viability of a feminist politics as it condemns women to perpetual oppression, and render them "objects of power rather than subjects with the capacity to resist" (Hartsock171-2).

In *Miriam's Flowers*, the Latina dramatist Migdalia Cruz has set out to explore how Puerto Rican women use their bodies to express their grief and suffering. Set in 1975 in Bronx, the play records the process of bereavement of a Puerto Rican family after their son gets trapped on train tracks when chasing after a baseball. Since they have no access to psychological therapy due to their poverty, they have attempted to use their bodies to cope with this trauma. In an

interview with Tiffany Ana Lopez, Cruz explains that her female characters resort to body language since it is "the only thing . . . they fully own" (211).

Blaming themselves for Puli's death, both Miriam and her mother manipulate their bodies to express their anger, sadness as well as come to terms with his death. A careful reading of the play will show that both mother and daughter have been greatly shaken by his death. As Cruz has mentioned briefly in the opening scene, Puli's death is due to authorities' neglect of poor immigrant communities. In a revealing sentence, Miriam describes the violence of poverty and how it marked her brother's body:

> Puli's dead, Ma. He was chasing after a baseball and got snagged on the tracks. He di'nt have no arms, remember? The train cut it right off and we couldn't find it. They had to pin up his sleeve like a little cripple boy in his little box . . . and they show him, Ma. How he was. All in pieces. I di'nt wanna look at it, but . . . he's the first one of us ever been in the paper. (MF 54-5)

Ironically, Puli's death has brought attention to this voiceless and marginalized family. For the first time, their names have appeared in the papers and they have been offered an economic compensation as well. To Enrique, Miriam tells of the authorities' reaction towards her brother's death: "We got eight thousand dollars for Puli. That's how much the judge figures he's worth. Who can fight wif a judge?" (*MF* 64).

Miriam's words reveal a great deal of bitterness. She believes that the little amount of money awarded to them is a sign of their social disempowerment and invisibility. In *QueerMonsters Within* (2012)Westengard explains how the government's response would have differed if Puli belonged to a different ethnic group. She writes:

> The family's desperate need for recognition is counterbalanced by the grosteque freak show quality of the newspaper coverage - an exposure that would spark outrage if the subject were part of a more politically empowered and socially visible demographic. (69)

Significantly, Westengard's words shed light on the way Latinos are treated in their host country. "Latinas/os living in the United States are most of the time ignored or considered by others to be at best a burden, at worst a threat" (Diaz and Mendieta 2). Therefore, society's negative reaction toward Puli's death make Mariam and her mother Delfina feel humiliated, neglected and invisible.

In an article entitled," Miriam's Flowers: A Riveting Portrait of Unbearable Grief" (1991) Lawrence Bommer writes that the most dangerous reaction comes from Miriam who shows an extremely complex and disturbing response to the death of her brother. It must be noted that Miriam has been victimized twice; once by an indifferent society which pays little attention to her suffering, and by her mother who refuses to acknowledge their loss. Thus, having no one to listen to her and provide her with emotional support or guidance, she chooses to use her body as a text through

which to convey her heart breaking experience. Thus, she begins "to create a narrative of the trauma on her own body- the infliction of pain becomes the text that can most effectively speak of her wounds" (Westengard 68). Consumed by guilt at being alive, she pulls out her eyelashes, and cuts flower patterns into her arms with a razor blade. She tells her lover Enrique how this act of cutting herself connects her with her dead brother:

> I cut . . . wif a nail clipper. I jus' clip off little parts and then I pump and pump until I come so there's blood on my pillow- so I know somefin' . . . happened. He only got hurt once, but I hurt all the time for him. I take his hurt from him so he don' feel it no more. (MF 64)

This ritual of self-inflicted pain becomes "a kind of ritualized tribute to Puli's death, a communication of her traumatic loss in a way that circumvents the failure of language that characterizes trauma" (Westengard 66). In the introduction to *Shattering the Myth: Plays by Hispanic Women* (1992) in which this play was published, Linda Feyder the editor shows how Puli's death leads young Miriam "to connect her pain to the physical suffering of the crucified Christ, thus seeking her own means of self-inflicted torture to feel she is alive" (7).

Miriam's manipulation of her body and her attempts to link her suffering with that of Christ underline her desire to transcend the roles which are available to her as a woman particularly those

dictated by the church. According to Sandra Cisneros, religion, like gender, has helped justifying the subordination of Hispanic women to males through the "production of a silence regarding Latinas and their bodies" (48). In one of the scenes, Miriam is seen standing in front of the statue of the Virgin holding the crucified Christ, cutting into her arm and bleeding onto one of Christ's wounds and says:

> I'm the invisible girl, Mary. . . always searching for a hole in the wall to pull myself through to get to the other side. The other side is only for me, I could see myself then. I could feel my fingertips then and the pointy pieces of skin being torn down the sides of my fingers. I could see the scars then, on the bottom of my thumbs from the Wilkinson swords- I write on myself them. I carve myself into my hands. (MF 70-1)

By allowing her cuts to bleed onto the statue of these religious figures, Miriam's endeavors to identify with the suffering of these martyrs are established. Her grief over the loss of her brother is further illustrated in exposing herself in the street. The way her brother met his tragic end as well as the public indifference toward their agony burdens her soul and makes her determined to share her pain with others. As demonstrated throughout the play, she develops a violent sexual relationship with the local grocer, Enrique, a thirty five year old. Miriam uses sex as her means of making Enrique share her pain and suffering as well as defying what the church claims about the sacrificial

element in the sexual act for Hispanic women. *In Borders and Thresholds* (1999) Michal Kobialka highlights the following:

> Latina women have been taught by the church to endure sex for procreation's sake. The Latina woman is not allowed to enjoy sex, for this would classify her as a putta, or whore. Thus sex becomes an obligation and even a dirty act for the decent woman, sometimes leading to a sense of punishment. (172)

Miriam's sexual relation with Enrique is far from being an "obligation" or "a sense of punishment", it provides her with a sense of relief as it enables her to share her pain and agony with him. Westengard writes: "While Miriam is masochistic in her attempts to narrativize trauma through the infliction of physical pain, the infliction is not limited to her own body. Her relationship with Enrique is decidedly sadistic in nature"(67). Thus, her violent sexual encounters with him and the carving that she insists on drawing on his arm symbolize her attempt to make him comprehend the unspeakable pain that is associated with her tragedy, as well as asserting her dominance over him.

Although "sexuality is the arena where patriarchal control is exerted most distinctively over the female body" (Katrak xi), in Miriam's case it is rather different. She is the one who controls and dominates her relationship with Enrique. In an article entitled "Violent Inscriptions: Writing the Body and Making Community in Four Plays by Migdalia Cruz"

(2000), Lopez states that Miriam's manipulation of her body as well as her sexual encounters have enabled her to initiate a process of "critical re-signification of the Hispanic women's role and identity"(186). She has managed to defy the negative notion that women's bodies are men's possession. She has proved that her body is her own, her tool of defiance and mourning.

In "I Carve Myself into my Hands" (2007) Agusti calls Miriam a performance artist who "turns her sexual experience into an artistic performance through which she can fragment her body and bond with her brother" (290). She also adds:

> Body art enables Miriam to gain full psychological autonomy and to situate herself and other Latinas outside the oppression they receive as others from their most immediate Latino communities as well as the larger American society. Body art signifies a return to corporal experience, attending both to the body's own materiality and to its perceptive dimension, and it resists the perpetuation and idealization of the body as object, particularly that of the female. (292)

Thus Body art has enabled Miriam to express her feelings of rage and grief as well as breaking the taboos regarding Latinas' bodies. One can easily deduce that her body is not a docile one, but "a body in revolt, corporalizing difference and heterogeneity" (Sandoval- Sanchez 549).

If Miriam exercises full control over her body, her mother Delfina

stands at the opposite extreme. Though deeply shaken by her son's death, she fails to show full autonomy over her body as her daughter did. Her reaction, as well as her behavior toward her loss reflects her adherence to the concept of the docile body. Her desire to have a perfect body like "Sophia Loren" and to "wear a very tight dress with big polka dots and big buttons" (*MF* 54) sheds light on her endeavors to discipline her body to conform to ideas based on men's desire about proper female appearance and body. Sandra Bartky in "Foucault, Feminity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (1988) explains that the subjection of the female to disciplinary practices such as dieting, exercise and beauty regiments is meant to take power away from them as well as make them conform to a stereotypical form of feminine identity (26).

Delfina's desire to abide by what society dictates concerning women's behavior and appearance has exiled her from her own body. She feels that "her body is disconnected from itself as though it does not belong to it" (Katrak 2006, 2). In other words, her determination to fulfill the image of a docile body has estranged her from her own body. She fails to deal with it as a site of resisting oppression, and effective weapon of consolation.

Delfina's failure to break the shackles that hinder her ability to use her body freely is further intensified by her belief that she has failed as a mother. Katrak explains how the notions of being good wives and mothers are used to control women's lives, and consequently, "the failure to be . . .

a good mother exiles the woman from her body" (212). This could be true about Delfina, who thinks that her son's death is a powerful manifestation of her failure as a mother.

In an attempt to cope with her tragedy, Delfina gradually resorts to body language. She descends into an alcoholic haze, believing that wine will help in soothing her pain. However, she discovers that the psychological scar that Puli's death has left cannot be easily forgotten or erased. She fails to stop her mind from recalling the painful memory of Puli's death.

Aspiring to liberate her soul from its agony, Delfina becomes engaged in the task of sacrificing pigeons' bodies. Revealing the healing power of killing pigeons, Delfina tells Miriam that" When I 'm not cooking pigeons, I'm not really alive"(*MF* 82). Highlighting the nature of this sacrifice, Agusti (2007) explains that besides feeling alive, the beheading of the chicken becomes:

> An initiation ritual through which she invokes abject forces and hybridizes them with herself in order to bring about a new experience of identity and sexuality, one that is removed from traditional cultural representations. (295)

This act of sacrificing pigeons did not help Delfina to overcome her pain, or forge a new identity different from the traditional Hispanic one. This is mainly because her mind is fully saturated with the concept of a docile body that prevented her from exercising full control over her body. One can easily see that Delfina is different from her daughter Miriam who managed to defy the

negative notions about Latinas' bodies. She lacks Miriam's courage to manipulate her body freely and use it as a tool of articulating her agony. Thus beheading pigeons did not bring her inner peace as she aspired.

Realizing that this act of sacrifice does not bring her relief, she decides to resort to her own body. She starts spending hours in a bathtub in a feeble attempt to wash away her sense of guilt. However, instead of attaining inner peace, she becomes imprisoned in the painful memory of her son's death. The tub becomes a reminiscent of Puli's coffin "small and white"(*MF* 55). Thus in a moment of despair, she decides to take her own life, thinking this will help her to attain inner peace. Ironically, it is Miriam who helps her to liberate her soul and body from pain and agony.

The play concludes with Miriam's engagement in a final act of sacrificing bodies. As described in the stage directions, Delfina dies, drowned in the bathtub and Miriam by her side carving flowers on her arms. This closing image could be interpreted as a hopeful metaphor for resisting the concept of the docile body as well of overcoming the oppressive forces of society that have stigmatized female bodies. Thus, the physical wounds that she inflicts on her body and her mother's become her means to "externalize psychic wounding that Latina characters must overcome if they are to rebuild and reimagine more tolerant and inclusive communities" (Lopez 66). It also illustrates her attempts to defy as well reject societies' treatment of female body as man's object and a product to be put on display.

The Native American dramatist Hanay Geiogamah in his play *Foghorn* (1973) shows how the European colonizers have attempted to exploit Native female bodies to ensure the eventual extinction of Native people. The Pocahontas myth and her alleged relationship with captain Smith that is dealt with in Scene V best illustrates the colonizers' endeavors to exercise full control over the Native female's body in order to crush the spirit of the Indian people, blunt their will to resist colonization and eventually eradicate Indian identity.

It is worth mentioning that the history of colonizing Native people has been interrelated with colonizer's assaults upon Native Indian bodies particularly the female body. Andrea Smith in "Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide" (1999) has argued how within the colonization process, the native bodies are transformed into a pollution of which the colonial body must purify itself. She explains that in the eyes of colonizers, Indian bodies are considered as inherently "dirty" as well as "polluted with sexual sin" therefore, considered "sexually violable and rapable" (10).

Smith further states that the negative perception of the Indian body has been widely used by the colonizers to lower the Native's self-esteem and make them believe it is "a sin just to be Indian" (12). It has also been used to justify their attempts to usurp the Native's land. In other words, colonizers think that since Native people's bodies are inherently violable, then their territories are violable as well. Finally, she shows that the manner in which Indians have been

mutilated and sexually abused throughout colonization "makes it clear that Indian people are not entitled to bodily integrity" (10).

Though the bodies of Indian men and women have been mercilessly attacked and mutilated, Ines Avila "In Praise of Insubordination, or What Makes a Good Woman Go Bad?" (1993) uncovers the reasons that made the female body the target of assault. Woman's biological ability to give birth makes her a desirable target of the colonizers, who perceives her as a threat to his colonial domination of the native's land. Avila states that "It is because of a Native American women's sex that she is haunted down and slaughtered, in fact, singled out, because she has the potential through child birth to assure the continuance of the people" (386).

The constant sexual violation of native women demonstrates the colonial desire to control and destroy women's reproductive abilities thus ensures the destruction of a nation (Stannard 45). Moreover, the high esteem in which native Indian women enjoy in their tribes has ironically rendered them the target of racism and abuse. Highlighting the significant role women have in Native Indian culture, Smith writes: "It was women who served as spiritual, political, and military leaders, and many societies were matrilineal; they are the central to their nations and any attack against them would truly begin the collapse of the society"(18).

The high esteem Native women held in their society were also viewed as a threat by white colonizers. They believed it set a

dangerous example to White women who wished to live free of patriarchal domination. European women were seldom accorded high status in their societies and were often persecuted (Smith 15). Therefore, European colonizers thought that the subjugation of Native women would not only ensure their domination over Native people but the White female as well.

In this light the Native American dramatist Hanay Geiogamah has dealt with the Pochantas' myth as a powerful illustration of the colonizers' attempt to control the Native community through the Native female body. Although *Foghorn* discusses land right issues, discrimination in public policy towards Native Indians, poverty and the loss of tribal land, the present research will focus only on the Pocahontas' myth that is dealt with in scene v, to show how the White Settler attempts to enslave Native Indians through the female body. In his handling of the Pochantas' love relation with the British captain John Smith, Geiogamah has been keen to deal with the mythical Pocahontas who bears no resemblance to the real one. The Pocahontas features here is similar to the one Disney portrayed in the 1995 film *Pocahontas*. She is not a child as the historical documents suggest, but rather a fully developed woman (Burk 1805). In *Native American Women* (2001), M. Bataille Gretchen and Laurie Lisa explain that Native women were judged on the basis of how helpful they could be to whites, and they referred to Pocahontas as a powerful example. They write that

Native women were judged on

the basis of how helpful they could be to Whites. Pocahontas who saved captain John Smith in 1607, and married John Rofle, a leader of the English colony in Virginia, is one famous example of an Indian women valued by Whites. (xiii)

Although historical records did not mention the romantic affair between Pocahontas and the English captain, or even that she was of a suitable age for such a relationship, European colonizers have tried to reverse facts by imagining a love relation between the two. This alleged love relation was meant to reinforce the negative stereotype of the Native female as either sexually inviting or available to White men, or the savage squaw who is lacking in White notions of morality, honesty and self-control (Merskin 243).

In his dramatic portrayal of Pocahontas's character, the playwright has been keen to disperse the negative ideas about Native Indian women. Scene V opens with Pocahontas singing "Indian Love Call' to captain Smith. It is worth mentioning that the song has been widely circulated in the American mainstream to show that Pocahontas is a "stereotype of the submissive, virgin, Indian princess" who is eager to please the White Settlers (Green 700). In other words, the song depicts Pocahontas as a docile body who is willing to respond to captain Smith's advances to make love to her. However, both Captain Smith and the White American audience fail to see that the song Pocahontas sings symbolizes her attempts "to pass her traditions to the White settler" (Pisani 248). Her voice

becomes her weapon of preserving her heritage and protecting her cultural tradition.

In *Writing on the Body* (1997), Kate Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury explain how the early colonizers have tried to control women's bodies and transform them into a "form of nature" to facilitate their dominance and defeat of Native nation. They write: "Just as man's civilizing impetus transforms wildlife, land, and vegetation into territories to tame and control, so too does it render a woman a form of nature to apprehend, dominate, and defeat" (2).

Nevertheless, by singing "Indian Love Call" Pocahontas essays to prove that Native women have voice and they intend to use it to protect their own cultural heritage, challenge the false allegations about being easy targets for colonial domination, as well as expose the empty promises made by the White colonizer to bring civilization to them. The part in which Pocahontas describes to her handmaidens how "big" captain Smith is, reveals the big promises made the early European colonizers to the Natives:

> He had such big legs. Such big arms. Such big chest. Such big, big head. Such big, big hands. Such big, big feet. Such big eyes. Such big mouth. Such big ears . And his hat was big. And his boots and his sword . . . and all of the other white men with him were big. (Geiogamah 63)

According to Pocahontas, captain Smith is gigantic, and powerful. The repetition of "big" helps in characterizing him in the same way

that the little Red Riding Hood describes the Big Bad Wolf (Burk 1805). Similar to the Big Bad Wolf, Smith is in disguise. He is luring Pocahontas into a trap by convincing her to take her clothes off and give him her virginity. Uncovering his attempts to seduce her, she says the following:

> First, he took me to his dwelling and he seemed, kind of nervous about me being with him. He told one of the other captains that nobody was to come to the hut. . . . He kept smiling at me, and then he asked me, if I was a Virgin. . . . I said to him, "Yes, yes, I'm a virgin". When I said this, he seemed to get kind of nervous, excited. He looked at me deeply . . . and told me he wanted me to know his body and that he wanted to know my body. (Geiogamah 61-2)

This seduction scene is very significant. First, it shows how the white colonizer deals with the Native Americans as naïve and can be easily fooled. Popular myth often portrays the American Indian people as naïve and willing to exchange huge tracts of land for copper kettles or beads (Burk 1805). In this case, captain Smith mistakenly believes that by promising Pocahontas to make her happy, she will give in to his temptation and give him her virginity. However, his sexual impotence proves the emptiness of his promises. His failure to fulfill his promises sheds light on the promises that were made and broken by the Federal government to the Native Americans.

It is worth mentioning that

Foghorn was written two years after the occupation of Alcatraz (1969) by activists of the American Indian Movement. The occupation came as an important step to awaken the American public to the plight of the Native Americans, to the suffering caused by the federal government's broken treaties and broken promises and the need for Indian self-determination (Underiner 38). Thus captain Smith's concluding words "I love you Pocahontas. I promise you it won't happen next time. I promise, I promise, I promise" (Geiogamah 65) serve as a "metaphor to stage and mock Europeans' impotence" (Underiner 39) and their failure to carry out their promises.

There is no doubt that captain Smith has perceived Pocahontas from a colonial point of view. For him, she is the sexually available Indian maiden, who besides being docile, symbolizes the land, its fertility and availability. He firmly maintains that the conquest of the Native American female body will guarantee the empirical invasion of the land. What captain Smith fails to see is that Native American women are not an easy target. In Pocahontas's case, she uses her voice to pass her oral cultural heritage, on the one hand and to expose his impotence and disability, on the other. By making Pocahontas speak and mock the captain's impotence, the dramatist has managed to defy the negative stereotype of Native American women as passive sex objects.

In *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012), the Egyptian- American playwright Yussef El-Guindi has dealt with the idea of female docility through the

dramatic portrayal of the American Sheri, and Gamila the Egyptian-American Muslim. The play centers around an Egyptian immigrant named Musa, who works as a cab driver in New York and his relationship with Sheri, a late-night diner waitress, and Gamila, the Egyptian-American Muslim who is chosen by his parents to be his future wife. I will attempt to show that by focusing on Musa's relation with the two women, the dramatist is able to explore the idea of female docility in both the American and Egyptian cultures.

This part contends that Sheri is a vivid illustration of a docile body. She is greatly obsessed with her weight and how others see her. To Musa, she tells him that thinking about her weight has always been among her chief priorities:

> Well, there's my weight. Right after God. Though the weight thing's more a private conversation I have with myself. I sometimes think just thinking about my weight is the issue, you know, like some private thoughts actually come with calories? Like there are fat thoughts, and thin thoughts. And I stopped with the heavy thoughts, I would be physically lighter. (El-Guindi Act I, Sc.i)

Sheri's words about her weight reflect her belief that women are defined and evaluated by their bodily shape and size. Following the example of many Western women, Sheri attempts to control her body to conform to cultural norms. Thus "by regimes of dieting, make up, exercise, dress"

she tries to "sculpt her body into the shape which reflects the dominant societal norms" (Bordo 91). Ironically, by adopting these practices of self-surveillance, she has "participated in her own commodification" (Conboy et al 10). In other words, her struggle to attain a stereotypical form of feminine identity has rendered her body into a commodity shaped by men's desires about proper female appearance and behavior.

Sheri's behavior also shows that she willingly disciplines both her body and mind aiming to conform to prevalent cultural norms. Although she is involved romantically with the Egyptian immigrant Musa, and is "getting comfortable in [his] world" (Act 1, scene iii), she cannot rid her mind of the negative ideas about his culture and religion. On knowing that Musa is engaged to Gamila, her negative attitude about his religion is brought to the surface. She starts criticizing Muslim men for curbing women's freedom by making them wear the veil. She tells him: "Isn't this the way you like your women? Hidden? Out of sight?" (El-Guindi Act II, scene i). Her words about the veil show how her mind is saturated with the widely circulated misconceptions about Muslim women dress. As shown Sheri embraces the Western ideas about the Muslim veil which equates it with oppression. Leila Ahmed in her book *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992) observes that "Veiling to Western eyes . . . became the symbol of both the oppression and backwardness of Islam" (52).

On seeing Gamila covered from head to toe, Sheri failed to hide her rejection of the Muslim women dress. She believes that Gamila

like the majority of Muslim women is forced into a state of invisibility by wearing the veil. She perceives her veil as a symbol of backwardness of Islam that denies her right to exercise full control over her body, and "imprison her behind walls and bars, hidden from men" (El Guindi 1999: 37). At this stage Sheri feels that she is superior to Gamila whose religion and culture have disempowered her by usurping her right to manipulate her body as she pleases.

Another example of docility is Gamila, Musa's fiancée. Similar to Sheri, she has attempted to discipline her body to live up to her cultural, social and religious expectations. Being of Arab origin, she has learnt from an early stage of her life to treat her body as something sacred. This is clearly shown in the way she wears her clothes. Gamila as indicated in the stage directions "wears a hijab and is somewhat conservatively dressed" (El-Guindi Act I, Scene v). On seeing Sheri, half-dressed in Musa's apartment, she does not hesitate to express her disgust at her behavior and the freedom she exercised over her body. Trying to humiliate her, she tells her:

> For your information, what I'm wearing doesn't mean I'm a nun, or a saint. Or even that I have spontaneous warm feelings for everyone I meet. It just means I believe in being modest. Not loud. Not showy. And not... easily available. (El - Guindi Act I, Scene v).

What Gamila is trying to do is to make Sheri feel ashamed of her

body. She tells her that the freedom she exercises upon her body will rob her of self-respect and will render her as a cheap physical object in Musa's eyes. Criticizing those who display their charms to be an object of people's gaze, she utters the following:

> I used to always wonder about girls like you in high school ... when I first came ... I couldn't understand how some girls could just throw themselves at boys. Be that easy. With no respect for themselves. People look at me and I think I'm the weak for wearing this. When I used to look at girls like you and think what a waste. How weak and pathetic. To get used like that. Do you think Musa thinks of you as anything else? (El-Guindi Act I, Scene v).

Gamila's words are highly ironic, as she does exactly the same with her body. Like Sheri, she has dealt with it as an object of gaze. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* explains that women from childhood are encouraged to treat her whole person as a doll, "a passive object . . . an inert given object" (306). They are taught to live their bodies as objects for another's gaze. Significantly, De Beauvoir's words apply equally to Sheri and Gamila. Sheri has tried to embrace disciplinary practices such as dieting and beauty regimens that ensure her attainment of a stereotypical form of feminine beauty. Gamila, too has tried to control her body and mind to conform to the norms of her cultural and religious life. As demonstrated throughout the play, Gamila has been keen to fulfill what is expected from her as an

Egyptian, Muslim woman. Although she has been fully integrated into the American way of life, she willingly accepts the traditional customs of Arab culture, where elders are already planning her future with Musa. Moreover, knowing that both her culture and religion dictate that Muslim women should be decently dressed, she does not hesitate wearing the "hijab". Her behavior with Musa is also characterized by conservativeness. She is barely seen expressing her feelings towards him. One can easily deduce that Gamila has willingly transformed her body into a docile one; a body that is regulated by the norms of her cultural background.

Therefore, the strict adherence to her cultural background has not only turned her body into a docile one but into an object of gaze as well. In other words, her "hijab" together with her conservative behavior have earned her the respect and admiration of those of her Arab community. Tayyib's words about her show that she has successfully managed to attain the image of a respectful Muslim woman. In his attempt to make Musa perceive the differences between Sheri and Gamila, Tayyib utters the following:

> Your Gamila is a jewel. And wants you for a husband .... She comes from a good family, and is respectable, and religious. She wants to finish school and become a nurse .... Don't mistake the woman who gives you pleasure with the woman who... will make you feel at home. And without this home, this country will eat you up little

by little. (El-Guindi Act I, Scene iv)

There is no doubt that both Sheri and Gamila by adopting systems of self-surveillance in which they constantly measure their individual attributes against valued cultural norms have helped in rendering them docile bodies. However, their fear of losing Musa has made them change their attitudes concerning their bodies. Sheri, for instance, decides to wear the veil. As indicated in the stage directions, she appears wearing "full niqab". Her love to Musa has made her re-examine her beliefs particularly those concerning her body. She realizes that she has participated in her own commodification by her blind adherence to the dominant societal norms. Therefore, her act of putting on the veil symbolizes her attempts to exercise full control over her body and mind. Although early in the play she has attacked the Muslim veil and associated it with female weakness and oppression, she now realizes that the veil will allow her to appear as an individual rather than as a purely physical object. She wants Musa to think of her as a decent individual and admire her personality and not to perceive her as a cheap sex object.

In a similar vein, Musa's relation with Sheri has acted as an eye-opener to Gamila who decides to confront her beliefs, customs and traditions. She has realized that she has blindly trained both her mind and body to please others and perform what is expected from her. Struggling to live up to her Egyptian cultural expectations, she tells Musa:

I've always felt... that you had these expectations of me. I

> felt I needed to behave a certain way around you... I thought you expected certain things of me. I felt worried that... the American part of me would spring out and shack you. And that I'd better behave like the well-brought up Muslim girl that perhaps you were used to. (El-Guindi Act II, Scene ii).

As shown, Gamila's action and behavior have been monitored by her cultural values. Although she is fully Americanized, she prefers to adhere to her traditions fearing to lose Musa's love. Nevertheless, on discovering that Musa is romantically engaged with Sheri, she decides to defy her docility. She becomes determined to break the shackles that imprisoned both her mind and body into a state of docility. Therefore, the act of taking off and putting on the veil symbolizes her endeavor to achieve physical and mental autonomy. She has decided to liberate herself from the negative forces that monitored her behavior and appearance. The play concludes with Gamila expressing her relief for finding her true self:

> I'm feeling pretty good myself. In spite of what's happened. May be because it happened- I feel like I could blast off into that night sky and go anywhere now. At the same time, I've never felt my feet more firmly planted on the ground, like I truly landed this time and came back home to something. (El-Guindi Act II, scene ii).

There is no doubt that the moment Sheri and Gamila exercise full control over their bodies, they

manage to attain this sense of freedom. The act of putting on and taking off the veil shows how both women have liberated both their bodies and minds from the oppressive forces of their society. Sheri decides to wear the veil even though she is certain that such behavior will make her an easy target of criticism and hatred. Similarly, by taking off and putting on the veil Gamila attempts to prove that her body is her own.

In conclusion, the three dramatists Magdalia Cruz in *Miriam's Flowers*, Hanay Geiogamah in *Foghorn* and Yussef El-Guindi in *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* have managed to explore the dynamics of the female body, and show how the female characters portrayed in their plays regard that their bodies as an effective tool in which they can fight the oppressive forces of societies that have long confined them into a state of docility. Cruz has successfully offered a powerful example of a young Latina who managed to manipulate her body to articulate her suffering and defy the oppressive forces of her Latin culture that tried to make her ashamed of her body. Geiogamah also has managed to present Native American woman from a purely different angle. The Pocahontas portrayed in *Foghorn* is far from being naïve and a mere sex object. She uses her voice to remind the White settlers that Native women have voices which they cannot silence, and they intend to use it to defend their own culture. Finally, El-Guindi in his play has examined the endeavors made by

the American Sheri, and the Egyptian-American Gamila to liberate both their bodies and minds from the disciplinary powers that render them docile bodies. Although the three playwrights have managed to offer various examples of the females' endeavors to exercise full control over their bodies, I think the most powerful example is provided by Cruz in *Miriam's Flowers*. Writing from women's perspective, Cruz has not only managed to voice the pain and suffering of her female characters who have been unjustly treated by their Latin culture, but has successfully managed to transform the female body from being a passive bearer of the negative social values to an active producer of meanings and values.

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