

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**POSSIBLE
SUBVERSIONS**

**The Narrative Construction of
Identity in Agnes Smedley's
*Daughter of Earth***

**A Pro Gradu Thesis
by
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POSSIBLE SUBVERSIONS. THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN
AGNES SMEDLEY'S *DAUGHTER OF EARTH*

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Pro gradu -työni käsittelee identiteetin narratiivista eli kerronnallista rakentumista Agnes Smedleyn (1892-1950) omaelämäkerrallisessa romaanissa *Daughter of Earth* (suom. Maan tytär (1991)). Johdannossa tuon esille feministisen tutkimuspolitiikkani. Ensinnäkin nojautun feministinen epistemologiaan, joka sanoutuu irti objektiivisesta tiedekäsityksestä: kaikki tieto on paikantuu "tietäjän" tutkimusasennon mukaan. Näin ollen oma tutkijajääneni on avoimen subjektiivinen ja pyrin paikantamaan sen kulloisenkin tutkimusasettoni suhteen. Toiseksi, koska työssäni pyrin osoittamaan *Daughter of Earth* -romaanissa nimenomaan niitä kohtia, joissa kirjoittaja tunkeutuu ulos kirjallisten tai muiden konventioiden asettamista rajoista, ja koska analyysini suurelta osin keskittyy tekstissä haastetun ja piilevän naisvihan osoittamiseen ja purkamiseen, tarkastelen johdannossa representaation politiikkaa.

Varsinainen analyysini jakautuu kolmeen osaan. Ensinnäkin tarkastelen niitä tapoja, joilla Smedley ylikirjoittaa perinteisen, kirjallisuudessa 1800-luvulla naispäähenkilön kehityskaarta hallinnutta romanssijuonta. Päädyn näin tarkastelemaan Marien, Smedleyn *alter ego*, matkaa ulos heteroseksuaalisesta parisuhteesta, perheestä, kirkosta, koulusta ja lopulta Yhdysvalloista. Tämä juonikehitys osoittaa Marien identiteetin rakentumisen pohjaavan suurelta osin disidentifikaatioon, ja analyysini seuraavassa osassa siirynkin tarkastelemaan lähemmin niitä prosesseja, joissa tämä, etenkin sukupuoli-identiteettiä rakentava disidentifikaatio tapahtuu. Analyysini kolmannessa vaiheessa pyrin valottamaan niitä tekijöitä, jotka osaltaan auttoivat Smedleyä saamaan feministisen kertojajäänenä kuuluviin. Tässä osassa luon pikaisen silmäyksen 1900-luvun alun naisliikkeeseen, ja tarkastelen lähemmin 1920-luvun amerikkalaista naiskuvaa.

Työni viimeisessä osassa tarkastelen aiemman analyysini valossa *Daughter of Earth* -romaanin feministisenä tekstinä, joka sekä haastaa että uudelleentuottaa Elizabeth Groszin määrittelemiä kolmea naisvihan muotoa eli patriarkaattia, seksismiä ja fallosentrismiä. Otan tässä yhteydessä lähilukuun kohtauksen, jossa päähenkilö raiskataan. Epilogissa palaan tutkija-asettoni ja työn henkilökohtaisen merkityksen tarkasteluun, ja mietin uusia muutoksen mahdollisuuksia.

Asiasanat: narratiivisuus, narratiivinen identiteetti, identiteetti, omaelämäkerrallisuus, feminismi, representaatio, yhdysvaltalainen feminismi, naisviha

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and all those whose names I have forgotten

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1. INTRODUCTION

Portrayal of suffering is [...] for women an act of truthfulness. It's also akin to an individual and collective catharsis. As women they've been obliged to keep quiet about what they go through, and have often converted into physical symptoms, mutism, paralysis, etc. Daring to manifest publicly individual and collective pain has therapeutic effect, bringing relief to the body and enabling them to accede to another time.

- Luce Irigaray, *je, tu, nous* (1990: 108)

All writing is political, and the first questions when reading any text should be: whom does it benefit? Who is it written for, in whose favour, from whose point of view and for whom? Why was the text written and what does it do? Several foci can be adopted, layers unravelled from the grammatical functions to metaphysical presumptions. The possibilities are unnumbered; the responsibility lies on the researcher, whose choices outline her politics.

In this work I have opened up a text which has been of great importance for me. In my reading through *Daughter of Earth*, and autobiographical novel by an early 20th century radical Agnes Smedley, I have sought to detect and understand the processes whereby she creates an identity for herself. Throughout, I have also sought for change, moments where conventions are contested and subverted, categories undermined and their boundaries blurred or shifted. The following thesis has been written over a period of two years during which time I have moved from textual literary analysis to the processes of identity work and from representation to the analysis of the ways in which the novel challenges and reproduces misogyny. The structure of my thesis reflects this movement and follows my own learning process. The chapters have been written in different times and different places, and vary in their style, tone, quality and mood. This inconsistency, on the other hand, reflects the quality of the novel I have analysed: neither *Daughter of Earth* nor my thesis offer final truths or solutions. They are both processes that enable a movement forward rather than fix meanings.

In this process, I have also used the text to sort out my own politics and self. *Daughter of Earth* has directed my interests to the discovery of women's history and the history of women's movement. I have used it to tackle issues in current feminist debates, and to locate myself in those debates. I have no illusions of having made the world a much better place to live in, nor have I saved anyone from dying of hunger, but: I could have done worse – and can do better in the future, having, once again – sorted out myself, and learned some critical reading.

Daughter of Earth is a book of recovery. One could say that it is a glimpse at the heart of darkness, reconciliation with a painful past, which, on a personal level, enabled Smedley to come to terms with herself and her past, gain agency and move on in life. On a more general level, *Daughter of Earth* offers an interesting analysis and depiction of the ways in which misogyny functions on social and cultural levels, manifested in the interpersonal relationships between the characters of the book, who are all based on actual human beings and their lives. Personal thus becomes both political and general – if not universal. In my analysis, I also wish to make it theoretical. Moreover, even though the book is situated in the early 20th century United States, misogynist discourses and practices underlie our Western culture today. Hereby, I hold that *Daughter of Earth* not only offers an account of the early formative years of a late radical, but also enables a reading which can be used as a means of empowerment of women today. (For Agnes Smedley my work does not do much good. She is dead, and if she wasn't, I am sure that she, a revolutionary, would regard me with a bit of scorn for all my abstractions and complexes in writing.)

Whenever we use language, we say things in order not to say something else¹. The history I learned at school centered around kings, constitutions, wars and the “great” men who conducted them, and thereby quite successfully avoided saying anything about women, or the factors that influenced and shaped their lives.

¹ For this idea I'm indebted to Claire Kramsch, who visited the 19th Summer School of Applied Language Studies “Language and Identity” 7-11 June, 1999, Jyväskylä.

Several feminists have pointed out and experienced this same male bias in the teaching and writing of *history*, and have argued for the writing of *herstory*. My decision to study Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*, a book written by another woman, makes my thesis part of the constructive feminist project that aims at uniting women on the basis that biological sex has been the primary reason for our oppression.

At the same time, I am perfectly aware of the poststructuralist feminist debates that deconstruct not only gender, the social construction attributed to and naturalized in relation to the biological sex, but also point out that the category of biological sex is a construct. I agree with Butler (1990) among others that these categories are problematic and function on the basis of exclusion of some real peoples lived experience. But I am also very aware of the fact that we are, at the wake of the 21st century, living in the world where the majority of the people living in absolute poverty are women. Women perform most work, and are world wide paid less than men. In Finland, the “model country for gender equality”, a woman earns approximately twenty percent less than a man performing the same job (Statistics Finland 1998), and each year thirty women are killed due to domestic violence i.e. wife beating. Women also form the majority of the world's thirty million refugees, but are minority in asylum seekers. Violence against women is increasing, around the world at least one in three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in some other way – most often by someone she knows. At least 60 million girl-children are “missing” from the world population due to sex-selective abortions, infanticide or neglect. An estimated four million women are trafficked i.e. bought and sold into marriage, prostitution or slavery each year (UNFPA Report, 2000). Women are also denied access to education far more often than men, and illiteracy is far more common among women than men. The most alarming and flagrant injustice directed against women at this historical moment is the gender apartheid practiced by the Taleban government in Afghanistan.

Given these figures and the realities behind figures, I, frankly, do not give a shit whether these injustices are based on an actual biological fact or social / discursive construction of a biological fact. The oppression is real, actual, urgent, a fact, and with these breasts and genitals that have been the basis for my own socialization as a woman, I consciously align and identify myself with the category of women – not claiming the power to represent them, but acknowledging the fact that I belong to the same category with admittedly blurred boundaries, and were the social structures around me different, my situation might not differ from theirs as much as they at the moment do. Instead of representative, I thus construct myself as an advocate for women. The question remains why do I sit in front of my computer banging away the keyboard to talk about narrative strategies and representation instead of lobbying my own and other governments for change?

1.1 On the Politics of Representation and My Research

In “Countering Textual Violence. On the Critique of Representation and the Importance of Teaching Its Methods.” Maaïke Meijer (1993:367-78) argues that feminist critique of representation does make a social and political difference. Her article is a defense and manifesto for politically engaged reading, her attempt is to bridge the gap between feminist scholarly writing and activism, to read feminist academic work as a form of activism. As an academy-oriented, theory-loving feminist I readily adopt her view. The kind of understanding of academic work as an engaged act of political activism Meijer suggests is the only way for me to make sense of academic work. Resistant, deconstructive reading, and the (naïve) belief that by practicing it and promoting its importance in my local environment, I could, in my own meagre way, contribute to the understanding of the fact that Afghan and other women are denied access to education, money, health care, human and public rights can never be legitimized on the basis of our sex nor gender, even though each and every patriarchal culture (and thus the vast majority of known cultures) actively produce and maintain practices, institutions, traditions, juridical systems, and other mechanisms that seek to legitimize violence and violations against women.

“In a single text very little is new.” Meijer (Ibid.:368) points out that cultural attitudes are already encoded in language, and these determine what belongs to the realm of already understandable, the utterable, and the ‘real.’ Meijer’s understanding of a text is discursive, based on Foucauldian concept of discourse containing the linguistic, the cultural, the socio-political, and the material as undivided, inseparable. Thus the text is not a mere representation of a reality that could be seen as separate from material reality. No, text is a reality in itself; it is part of the very reality it describes, creating the reality it describes at the very moment of description. A text thus simultaneously creates and represents material realities, and in Meijer’s view any utterance is an act, and consequently, violence in a text is an act of violence.

In “Countering Textual Violence” Meijer analyses textual, raced and gendered representations of violence in a Dutch newspaper and a children’s book pointing out instances where violence is naturalized. She argues that these texts contribute to the violence against ethnic minorities and women in the contemporary Dutch society. Importantly, the authors of these texts represent the hegemonic positions in society, and legitimize the violence in the texts. In *Daughter of Earth*, however, the physical, economical, social and sexual violence faced by women is never legitimated, naturalized. Rather, it is exposed, revealed, brought forth in order to write into existence and acknowledge what already exists unconceptualized and easily ignored, or misunderstood. To make it real and to make it matter. To voice it. Thus the violence depicted in *Daughter of Earth* differs from the violence analysed by Meijer in regards to the writer position, and as a feminist reader, I take it as my responsibility to hear that voice, take it seriously, engage in a dialogue with it and discover the processes whereby it comes into being as the same time as my reading of it reproduces it. The feminist text creates me as a feminist at the same time as I create it as a feminist.

Meijer’s article brings forth a number of issues important to my research and analysis of Smedley’s autobiographical novel. First of all, the simple statement “in

a single text very little is new” points out the limits of subversion within a single text: in order to write a novel Smedley had to, first, rely on the (patriarchal) language available to her (English). She also had to rely on the narrative conventions, choose a genre as a starting point. In the process of writing the fragments of her life that she chose to depict the real experiences are woven into the realities of the text within the limits of memory, available language, discourses, and narrative structures. Thus both language and culture impose limits on the narrative possibilities and possible subversions of the narrative. In my analysis of the narrative strategies, I have sought to discover the ways in which Smedley’s narrative both resorts to popular romance plot evoking moments which relate it to the genre creating conventional expectations and point out occasions where she frustrates those expectations, subverts the traditional role reserved for women in popular romance literature. The title of my thesis, *Possible Subversions* thus refers to the narrative strategies that were allowed by the books literary, socio-historical, political, historical, linguistic and psychological context.

Meijer (1993:369) also states that representation constructs identities and subject positions for its users. In the case of an autobiographical novel such as *Daughter of Earth* both the writer and the reader can be regarded as these users. In the opening pages of *Daughter of Earth* Smedley writes: “I shall gather up these fragments of my life and make a crazy-quilt of them. Or a mosaic of an interesting pattern – unity in diversity. This will be an adventure”(DE, “); in her later novel, *Battle Hymn of China* (1943:23), Smedley describes *Daughter of Earth* as “a desperate attempt to reorient my life.” Both of these quotes refer to the fact that the writing of this autobiographical novel, an account of a life is simultaneous process of remembering and creating a memory, an act of writing into existence an identity which is created in the process of writing it. The building blocks of this identity lie in the language and discourse, the ideological grids available to the writer.

As another user of the text, the reader, the analyst, interpreter and critic, I could have relied solely on the narrative of *Daughter of Earth*. I could have read the text

through theories, concentrating on the textual level, analysed the reality it created in front of me as a text out of nowhere. I could have believed Barthes (1977)² and killed the author by ignoring her as a writing, bodily subject. This, actually, was my first plan, but as I had first of all chosen to write on the novel precisely because it was written by a woman, primarily about women, and second, because I had difficulties in grasping the text based only on the words and I also wanted to discuss the novel as a process of creating an identity, I needed to know whom this identity was created for. What purposes would it serve? What were the discourses it drew on? How did it link to the historical and socio-political situation it was written in?

Thus already when writing the first part of my analysis on the structure and narrative strategies of *Daughter of Earth* on the basis of movements beyond the couple, the family and society, I found myself browsing histories about the early twentieth century United States, about politics, women's movement, and the life of Agnes Smedley. Instead of analysing the novel, I became intrigued about the woman who wrote it, and the historical moment she wrote it in. Consequently, I turned to sources that offered other narratives about her and her surroundings, and the context of my analysis shifted from literary genre (romance) to the personal, historical and socio-political one.

Together with Rachel Blau DuPlessis' *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985), the most important source that in the end enabled me to structure my analysis was another, later work by Smedley. In *Battle Hymn of China*, she offers an account, a new narrative of the years covered in *Daughter of Earth*. In *Daughter of Earth* the immediacy of the events leads into a long and complex (and at times confusing)

² I am here referring to Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" where he argues that in any text, it is the language that speaks, not the author. He argues that the meaning of a text is negotiated intertextually between the textual realities of the reader and the text, and that the author is completely irrelevant in this process. Feminist scholars, on the other hand, have done exactly the opposite and asserted that the author is gendered and that the fact that the body has functioned as the basis of women's inclusion from the literary canon, has distorted the literary image of women. (C.f. for example *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millet)

narrative. Smedley draws on dream-like childhood memories, portrays a great number of characters of varying importance, uses an invented narrator (alter ego Marie), inserts fictive elements and shifts into the autobiography. She seeks meaning in dreams, and the novel consists of number of passages where the narrator negotiates her relationship to other characters, reflects her own experiences against their experiences.

In *Battle Hymn of China*, however, what in *Daughter of Earth* took nearly three hundred pages to recite, is fitted into thirty pages. Smedley no longer uses an invented narrator, no longer protects other characters with pseudonyms, and she locates the events that took place in Europe in Europe instead of the United States. The narrative is not only shorter, it is much more matter of fact, less emotional. It is coherent, concise, a skeleton of the earlier novel, clearer, barer, and much more rigid. Smedley wrote *Battle Hymn of China* in 1943, fourteen years after the publication of *Daughter of Earth*. Also, in *Battle Hymn of China* the narrative functions as an introduction, as a definition of the subject position of the narrator of the story to come, whereas *Daughter of Earth* is an account and a process whereby this identity is negotiated. This, too, explains why the new narrative is so different to the earlier one.

As I stated above, my own reading greatly benefitted from Smedley's "Glimpses of the Past" as she calls the short memoir in *Battle Hymn of China*. It helped me to grasp the text and to structure my analysis pointing out the institutions, state apparatuses, and ideologies that she herself considered most crucial to her development. Smedley thus both provided me with the object of my research, *Daughter of Earth*, and, in *Battle Hymn of China*, a frame for my analysis. (To point out the importance of *Battle Hymn of China* for my research, I have cited passages from the book throughout my analysis of the narrative strategies of *Daughter of Earth*.) Through these two texts she, or rather her self-narratives, thus became very much a Subject – as opposed to object – in my research. To emphasize this point, I use the same font size when quoting her texts as in my own analysis:

the passages I cite are just as important part of my research as is the analysis itself. I thus engage myself in a dialogue with her texts. In this discussion, not only the tones our voices vary and differ from each other, but we also speak in different tenses: her narrative voice reaches back and recalls the past, which, as I read, becomes my narrative present/se. Thus, she speaks in the past tense, whereas I use the present tense.

Another important source which I used to familiarize myself with the life and times of Smedley, was a biography written by Janice R. and Stephen R. MacKinnon. Their book, *Agnes Smedley. The Life and Times of an American Radical* provided me with background information about the socio-political and historical context, as well as glimpses at Smedley's letters, and yet another narrative of Smedley's life.

1.2 The Aims and Contents of My Thesis

The primary aim of the study is to discuss the narrative construction - as well as the conditions and meaning - of identity in *Daughter of Earth*. By narrative identity I simply refer to a story that Smedley, through her *Alter ego*, Marie Rogers, creates about whom she is, where she comes from, and where she is going. Identity thus includes the dimension of time: the time of narration effects the narrative, which gains different emphasis at different times as has happened to Smedley's life-story in *Battle Hymn of China*. Identity is also mediated in and through the narrative conventions of the particular genre it adopts. An autobiographical novel, for example, has to, to an extent, conform to the conventions of a novel. The narrative is also limited by the restrictions of the particular language it is mediated through: each language has its own categories for conceptualizing the world, and the narrator is as limited by these categories as s/he is by her ability to use that language. Cultural norms, conventions, historical moment, prevalent discourses, rules of appropriateness, govern the publishing policies and thus cultural (re)production limiting the number and form of narrative choices available to the author.

Thus, when negotiating and constructing an identity for herself within the limits of autobiographical novel, the author's self-narration is restricted - and made possible! - by a number of factors that together form the representational context. The author herself is, however and by no means, situated outside of these factors; she may not even be conscious of them. No identity and no conventions, however, are fixed, but the fact that they are culturally produced and constantly reproduced makes it possible to negotiate the limits of discursive categories and conventions. And what else is literature all about than seeking new forms of expression, expanding the limits of our perceptions?

Whenever a norm, convention, word or phrase is questioned, challenged, transformed into new meanings, a subversion takes place. Subversion is a revolution, a challenge to the norm, the accepted, the conventional, the appropriate, the established on any level where identities are negotiated. Subversions are not always positive, but in relation to the conventions that have limited and distorted women's representation in literature, I regard them invaluable. With my title, *Possible Subversions*, I refer not only to the fact that Smedley's narrative subversions were restricted by all the factors mentioned above, but that in my own analysis I also consciously (re)search for those subversions wanting to find them, wanting to emphasize the text's subversive power, and wanting to point out new possible venues for subversion.

For the writer, this creation of a narrative identity through the construction of an *alter ego* may serve as a mirror. But her expressions and thus the image may change, and the perception of it varies due to her³ mood, angle and also background. Narrative identity is a story about her life, narrated in a certain environment and life situation, in a historical point in time, and the point of view is affected by her goal and motivation of narration. By recalling her past the author

³ As I am here concentrating on the importance of feminist autobiographical writing, I will refer to the author as her, even though the discussion may apply to men's writing as well.

creates a story of her life, or certain aspects of it, in order to become something. This is the process I will engage in discussing throughout my thesis.

First, however, in order to familiarize myself and the reader with the novel, I will provide a reading of the text, and discuss how Smedley in *Daughter of Earth* rewrites and subverts the narrative conventions of the Victorian era. I will discuss the novel in relation to the narrative conventions of 19th century novel and especially romance concentrating on subversions of women's roles and lines of development in them. These lines of development, I will simply refer to as plots.

As *Daughter of Earth* is a *Bildungsroman*, I will discuss it as a process whereby the narrator creates and outlines her identity and political worldviews and aims. It is not, however, only a description of "how I became to be me", but it is in itself a tool for self-understanding, which, in Smedley's case, enabled the construction of political agency. As a published work it was – and is! – part of a wider public discourse of political change both in terms of structure and contents. Thus, after I have outlined the plots, I will move on to discuss the characteristics, possible meanings and politics of her (gendered) identity. In the process of identity construction we need both objects of identification (positive role models) as well as those of disidentification. Marie's identity is constructed primarily in terms of disidentification. Especially her gender identity is based on processes whereby she distances and differentiates herself from other women, which is why I will discuss this point in detail in the chapter on Identity as/at Work.

Next, I will relate Marie's characterization to the representations of women at the time of its publication. I will speculate on the characteristics and compromises in the construction of the narrative voice and strategies that enabled the book's publication and success in the 1920's. Furthermore, as a conclusion, I will discuss the feminist politics of *Daughter of Earth* in terms of misogyny pointing out moments where this feminist text relies on and constructs misogynist discourses.

2. AGNES SMEDLEY 1892-1950

Agnes Smedley was born in 1892 in Northern Missouri to a poor, illiterate rural family.⁴ Her family moved around the mining camps owned by the Rockefellers in Southern Colorado and New Mexico due to her father's pursuit of fortune. These hopes of financial success failed repeatedly, and Smedley's early years were marked by constant and bitter struggle against poverty. Since an early age her life oscillated between hard work and education. After her mother's death in 1908 she was left to take care of her younger sister and brother's as well as her sister's baby, but yearning for education she decided against child care, and struggled to educate herself. She strongly believed that she could only really help her family by helping them and herself out of intellectual poverty. Despite this belief, the years she worked and studied were marked by feelings of guilt over the condition of her family.

In 1911 she studied at Temple Normal College (now Arizona State University) where she became editor of the college magazine, and also met Thornburg Marie Brundin and her brother Ernest. These two committed socialists' had an enormous emotional, social and political impact on Smedley's life. They introduced her to socialism, a theory and politics which resonated Smedley's experiences of social injustice, and furthermore, offered a political solution to combat them. Smedley and Ernest Brundin married. Their marriage, however, was shadowed by Smedley's conviction – confirmed by her experience and theorized already in 1898 in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1898) – that true equality in a marriage was impossible and that for a woman, it inevitably meant humiliating servitude. She was also terribly afraid of pregnancy which she conceived, very much like Simone de Beauvoir (1949), the ultimate reason for women's oppression, and had two stressful abortions. Smedley and Ernest Brundin divorced in 1916. The Brundins and Smedley, however, remained friends all her life.

⁴ Autobiographical data based on the Afterword by Rosalind Delmar in Virago Press print 1977 and *Agnes Smedley. The Life and Times of an American Radical* by the MacKinnons (1988).

After the marriage Smedley moved to New York where she worked in the birth control movement with Margaret Sanger, wrote for the socialist newspaper *The Call* and continued her studies at university. In New York she also became a member of the overseas Indian Independence movement, the members of which became much like a family for her, and whose political struggle became her cause. In 1918 she was arrested and charged under the Espionage Act as part of the British intervention against the Indian exiles. She was sent to prison without a trial for six months.

After her imprisonment, Smedley wrote her first published short stories “Cell Mates”⁵, which reflects her experience in the prison. In 1920 she moved to Berlin where she lived and worked together with Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (Anand in *Daughter of Earth*). Chattopadhyaya was an Indian exile of upper-class background and another leading figure in the Indian Independence movement. Due to their domestic and political difficulties (they were followed and kept under surveillance by British spies and were constantly changing their addresses) Smedley’s mental and physical health broke down, and after a few years of suffering she began psychoanalysis.

At the time, in mid 1920’s, “the issue of feminine identity was being hotly debated [in the Institute ... and Karen] Horney, among others, was challenging Freud’s theories of the “castration complex” and “penis envy”” (MacKinnons 1988: 91).⁶ Smedley’s analyst, Frau Dr. Elizabeth Naef, a middle-aged, Socialist Jew and an associate of the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute, however, was more orthodox Freudian, and in letters to Florence Lennon, a close friend of hers, Smedley described her first feelings and impressions of the analysis in following ways:
After the first week:

“When I find the origin of things which hurt me, I’m so interested that I forget to be hurt.” (MacKinnons 1988:91)

⁵ They were published in the Sunday magazine section of the Socialist daily, the *New York Call*.

⁶ Early members of the Institute included e.g. Melanie Klein and Wilhelm Reich. (MacKinnons 1988: 91)

After three weeks of analysis:

“I am too young in the analysis business to tell you what is wrong with me. But you may be interested to know that I have a deep castration complex which colors all my relationships. I gained the earliest impression that I was made into a girl by my penis having been cut off! Someday I’ll be able to relate many interesting things to you. You may, however, get some light on my contempt for women as a sex and at the same time my bitter feminism. Likewise my life-long man-ishness.”(Ibid.: 91).

After half a year:

“I need this analysis for my life.” (Ibid.: 97)

These extracts show that Smedley found analysis helpful as it offered her tools to analyse, organize and understand the structure and formation of her views on gender. She remained critical about psychoanalysis, but desperately needed some way of dealing with her painful past. (As a matter of fact she became so dependent upon it, that in 1924 when Naef left Berlin for a conference in Austria, Smedley reacted with a nervous attack (ibid.: 97)). Smedley’s attitude towards psychoanalysis embodies her relationship to any other theoretical analysis or tool: she embraced what seemed relevant to her, but never adopted it as a doctrine.

As a result of her analysis, Smedley was able to write *Daughter of Earth* as well as to finish her destructive relationship with Virendranath Chattopadhyaya. Writing *Daughter of Earth* was thus part of her recovery, and after its publication in the United States she left for China which became the site and source of her life’s work. She first worked as a correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and later for the *Manchester Guardian*. She became deeply attached to China and the Chinese Revolution, and her life work includes several books and an abundance of articles on China. Despite her disillusionment about the Soviet Revolution, she held on to her anti-imperialist politics, struggle against poverty and ignorance, commitment to the revolution throughout her career as a journalist. She never concealed the side she was on, and wrote abundantly on women. In the 1940’s she returned to the United States where she lectured and wrote on China, became a victim of McCarthyism (like so many others, she was accused of being a Soviet spy, and all

her work was removed from bookstores and libraries).⁷ Smedley, whose health had broken on several occasions previously, was determined to return to China, but died in England waiting for her visa in 1950. Friend of Mao Tse-Tung, she became the first non-communist foreigner to have her ashes buried in Peking's National Memorial Cemetery of Revolutionary Martyrs.

In addition to *Daughter of Earth* and "Cell Mates", Smedley's other literary work include such titles as *Chinese Destinies: Sketches of Present-Day China* (1933), *China's Red Army Marches* (1934), *China Fights Back: An American Woman with the Eighth Route Army* (1938), *Battle Hymn of China* (1943), *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh* (1956), *Portraits of Chinese Women in Revolution* (1976, edited by Jan and Steve MacKinnon). She also wrote pamphlets and, of course, masses of articles.

3. INTRODUCING DAUGHTER OF EARTH

In this chapter I will first introduce the structure of *Daughter of Earth*. Then I will discuss previous studies on the novel and Smedley's work paying special attention to Aránzazu Usandizaga's (1994:37-47) reading of *Daughter of Earth*. My debate with her should highlight *Daughter of Earth* as a feminist work where the dichotomy between the private and the public sphere is constantly subverted and contested.

3.1 The Structure of *Daughter of Earth*

Daughter of Earth is a *Bildungsroman*: Marie, the narrator, recalls her past, path and way into the "I" that she at the time of narration identifies herself with, or rather to work out what that "I" might entail. The structure of the novel is thus circular, and in the opening scene Marie is in Denmark and has already written down her story. Whatever will follow, is her story, her *Bildung*, development into

⁷ This information is from the foreword by the publisher of the Finnish translation (1991) of *Daughter of Earth*

what she is at the beginning of the novel. The end of the novel is thus the beginning of a new life. This narrative choice inevitably affects the reading: there is always some hope, at least a guarantee of her survival, in the endless struggles and battles, crises and backlashes that characterize the course of her life and development from an illiterate proletarian girl to a radical journalist and dissident.

In “A Journey into Knowing” Nancy Hoffman (1991) analyses the structure of *Daughter of Earth*. According to her, the novel moves from “mythic to novelistic to autobiographical roughly in accordance with the movement from childhood to young womanhood to adulthood”. (Ibid:173). Hoffman points out that the tone and narrative detail in *Daughter of Earth* are unconventionally inconsistent. For example, in the descriptions of childhood (chapters 1-3) the people and events in the are out of proportion: the characters are depicted as gigantic, which is due to the usage of a child focalizer by the adult narrator (see, for example “Out of the Church.”) The middle years, on the other hand, (young adulthood in chapters 4 and 5) follow more novelistic conventions of growing up. These conventional stages include Marie’s leaving home, work, romance and education.

So far, so conventional, but the two long final chapters consist of political analyses, “details of meetings, questions of judicial proceedings, office disputes, the pedestrian trials of urban poverty”. (Ibid:173). The final chapters are a construction of a multi-sided and complex worldview, an attempt to pull together, or at least present, the discursive and lived realities, a mass of events and socio-psycho-emotio-political crises that construct the hybrid self and the political stance of the author. Towards the end of the novel, love and family fall in the background making space for ideological and intellectual debates, and this, as Hoffman points out, was (and in popular literature, I would argue still is) a radical choice.

3.2 Previous Studies on *Daughter of Earth*

Despite the fact that *Daughter of Earth* was translated into Finnish in 1991, Agnes Smedley and her work have remained little known, so in order to find anything on her, I have had to look elsewhere. In the following, I will present the main points of the pitifully few articles I have managed to get hold of. Lastly, I will engage myself in a (joyous) debate with Aránzazu Usandizaga's reading of *Daughter of Earth* as a confusion of private and political agendas.

Daughter of Earth has, to some extent, been studied in the United States from the point of view of victimization and empowerment, class and violence. An MLA search on Smedley resulted in fourteen works (articles and dissertations), most of which were written by American scholars and discussed *Daughter of Earth*. Of these articles I managed to find only four. Judith Scheffler's "Agnes Smedley's "Cell Mates": A Writers Discovery of Voice, Form, and Subject in Prison" (1988) discusses the feminism of Smedley's "Cell Mates" and her politics of voicing the experiences of the oppressed. Scheffler points out Smedley's concern over importance of the narrator's the point of view, empathy and her own role as a participant and observer at the same time. I regard this as an important aspect, and I will discuss it further in relation to the novel. Scheffler's article, however, merely touches lightly upon these themes and is primarily concerned with "Cell Mates". Thus, it will not serve as point of further reference.

Renny Christopher (1995), on the other hand, discusses the importance of including a working-class perspective in the teaching of literature at schools. In "Working-Class Literature's Challenge to the Canon" (1995:45-55) s/he(?) discusses the statement that "a college degree is certification that one belongs to the middle class." Christopher argues that the inclusion of working-class literature in would not only challenge the canon, but also the definitions of literature and education itself. For the working-class students this inclusion could increase their interest in literature, for the middle-class, it should demonstrate the fact that middle-class values are neither neutral nor universal (Christopher's observation having been that

this assumption often prevails among the middle-class students). Christopher's article highlights classroom as a place where cultural aspects of class can either be conformed and confirmed or confronted and challenged, and that cultural exclusion and inclusions made there not only reflect but also contribute to what happens outside the classroom. *Daughter of Earth* deals both with the working-class pupils' alienation in the classroom as well as the cultural class differences, which I will discuss later in chapter 4.3.1 "Out of School". The focus of Christopher's article, however, is on education. Thus, it will not be discussed further.

The two most valuable articles on *Daughter of Earth* for my study have been Nancy Hoffman's "Journey into Knowing" (1991:169-82) and Aranzazu Usandizaga's "Two Versions of the American Dream" (1994:37-47). Hoffman's article helped me to get a grip of the structure of *Daughter of Earth* whereas Usandizaga's line of argument with its infuriating conservatism enabled me to tackle the feminist politics of the novel. I will use Hoffman's article in the section on narrative strategies. The following is what followed from my encounter with Usandizaga:

Politicizing the Personal by Publishing the Private: A Discussion on Aranzazu Usandizaga's Reading of Daughter of Earth. Aranzazu Usandizaga evokes a discussion on the intermingling of the personal and political aspects of *Daughter of Earth* in her article "Two Versions of the American Dream. Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* and Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*" (1994:37-47). She is concerned about the connection between language and ideology in the two books by the early 20th century women writers, whose books she defines as openly political in their plots, and points out that in these texts the personal determines the political. She, however, maintains the separation of these realms in stating that the authors' "incapacity to find the verbal models by which to express their own desires confuses their public agendas and as a consequence transforms their texts [to the extent that] Smedley's somewhat confused project of political revolt as

expressed by her narrator loses some of its intensity because of the uncontrolled psychological damage inflicted upon her character's early self." (1994:42, 46)

I strongly disagree with Usandizaga on these points. First of all, I take that personal *is* political, and thereby Smedley's narrator's confusion is in itself a political matter, in itself a public agenda. Secondly, it seems to me that Usandizaga is trying to read out a clear political agenda out of *Daughter of Earth*, whereas I see its ingenuity lying in Smedley's ability to draw, as Nancy Hoffman (1991) has pointed out, on feminist, Marxist and psychoanalytical, and I would add colonial, theories without even attempting to make an easy pact out of these. Each of these discourses touch upon each other in *Daughter of Earth*, but none of them suffices to define, determine or even explain her or her experiences, self, life, or politics.

Usandizaga is right, however, in pointing out that Smedley's narrative voice is a confused one. *Daughter of Earth* was one of the books by women writers that broke the female silence in literature seeking ways to describe women's lives from within "the female experience." Like Usandizaga puts it, *Daughter of Earth* thus belongs to a "tradition of silence, rhetorical uncertainty and disguised authority" (Ibid:38). There are several occasions when language and the narrators voice, when trying to articulate her politics and experiences, fail her, leaving her in fury and frustration. Reading *Daughter of Earth* from a feminist point of view, I do not, however, read these occasions as a confusion of her political agenda, nor do I agree that they subvert the book's message. On the contrary, I take these silences to point out situations and realms where women in Smedley's times, and still today, need to find voice and ways to articulate themselves, as well as to win acceptance on their doing so. The silences themselves are an important part of the book's messages, and the very distinction between the private and the public realms what needs to be subverted and deconstructed.

Usandizaga's reading of Marie's (Smedley's *alter ego* and narrator) development into *Eine Frau Allein* (the title of the German translation) seem to reveal more of

the reader than the actual development of the protagonist's feminist politics. Usandizaga writes: "[T]he narrator's identity originates in a dehumanized need to reject the mother's culture, the traditional *feminine talents of love and motherhood*. *Since precisely the ability and the natural desire to love and nurture one's children is responsible for her beloved mother's tragic life and premature death* [my emphasis...], the narrator can only choose to suppress her impulses towards love and tenderness in view of what they can cause". (Ibid:45).

Again, I read *Daughter of Earth* quite differently from Usandizaga. Smedley points out on several occasions that, in her view, it were the socio-economic restrictions set upon her mother, among other women, as a woman and a wife, that caused her deprivation of the ability to show affection, to nurture, and even provide decent living standards to her children. The desire to love and nurture may be natural to human beings, but they were by no means responsible for Marie's mother's premature death. Her "destiny" originates from poverty, hunger, denial of socio-economic and public power and agency, her subordination to a drunkard husband as a wife and a woman, *not* from her "feminine virtues" that manifested themselves, for example, in her beating of the young Marie. Moreover, this same reality produces, in other words socially constructs, Marie's own psychological problems and resentment toward marital relationships.

It is true, however, that Smedley's awareness of women's suppression and feminism seem to spring out of personal experiences rather than from a theory. It is a point worth making that her encounter with Marxist discourse on class as well as world politics are both marked by an encounter with other people, and represented as something learned from sources outside of herself. Her Socialist awareness is initiated by her friendship with Karin and Knut Larsen.⁸ The questions of global power relations, ethnicity, race and nationalism, on the other hand, are brought to her awareness by Sardar Ranjit Singh, called Sardarji⁹, one of the leading figures of

⁸ Their real names were Thorberg and Ernest Brundin. (MacKinnon & MacKinnon (1989)).

⁹ Pseudonym for Lajpat Raj. (MacKinnon and MacKinnon (1989)).

the Indian independence movement. These discourses thus become embodied, and the first encounters with the persons representing these ideologies evoke a vocabulary of divinity. This point will be discussed further in 4.3.2 Out of School in the next chapter.

Smedley's feminist awareness, on the other hand, does not become embodied in any single person, and I understand it as an implication of the fact that unlike Socialism and nationalism, it had not yet been established as a study and discourse, which could be adopted from a source outside of oneself.¹⁰ This, however, does not mean that Smedley was alone with her feminist ideas in the era. As she was born in 1892, the formative years coincide with what is called the Progressive Era (1890-1917) in the United States (at least by feminists!), and this period meant important changes in many women's lives. During these years they entered work and public life and education in greater numbers than ever before, they gained vote in most states, organized women's clubs, joined and founded unions, and fought against poverty (See e.g. Riley (1986), Rowbotham (1997)). It was also made easier to get a divorce, and towards the end of the era, birth control became more acceptable and legal.

Smedley thus grew up in the era when women's lives and social roles were radically changing, but as Jill Conway (1971) points out in "Women Reformers and American Culture, 1870-1930" this had no great impact on the representation of women or the ideals concerning femininity. Conway's study shows that there were two prominent types of women reformers: the sexually neutral [sic!] professional expert or scientist, and "the sage or prophetess who claimed access to hidden wisdom by the virtue of feminine insights." (Ibid:435) The second type, the sage is represented for example by Jane Addams who is one of the best-known social reformer and activist in the woman suffrage, peace and settlement movements in

¹⁰ The fact that psychoanalysis also remains "unembodied" in *Daughter of Earth* may result from two facts: like feminism, it was still a new discourse - even if much more theorized, and secondly, in *Daughter of Earth* Smedley's psychoanalysis falls in between the time of narration and the narrated time being thus absent in the plot, but present in the narrative voice.

the early 20th century United States. This type was well-adopted by North American popular culture whereas the scientist type had little appeal to the public.

Moreover, Conway points out that not only the public, but also their self-image of the “prophetesses” relied on the traditional discourse on femininity, and they themselves could neither recognize their (masculine) will to power. Nor could they convey the implications to traditional understanding of womanhood of the fact that their independent life style stood in striking opposition to the(ir) passive stereotyped image of a woman. Instead, these hard-working, aggressive, pragmatic and rational women relied on a view of women that emphasized women’s intuitivity and moral superiority - and not equality or sameness – in relation to men, and thereby reinforced the female stereotype rather than deconstructed it. (Ibid: 441)

Conway argues that the fact that these middle-class reformers left the concepts of femininity, female psyche and Victorian sexual stereotypes intact actually enabled divorce and birth control reforms win acceptance. As they emphasized women’s ability to love and nurture, their rhetorics did not threaten the family as an institution. Rather, the argument went, the reforms would enable women to fully enjoy and practice their role as mothers. The tragedy of this tactic is that it also, as Conway points out, created ground for the most misogynist views on the female psyche of Freudian psychoanalysis, and enabled the re-domestication of women on the basis that women, by nature, were still passive, submissive, emotional and irrational rather than rational and active.

Smedley was neither sage nor scientist. She asserted her right to her own body and sexuality, and, in the end gained a public voice as a journalist, but saw no possibility of matching these with a marriage. Nancy Hoffman and Usandizaga both point out that *Daughter of Earth* is a description of a young woman’s struggle to self-knowledge and understanding. Conway’s article, on the other hand, manifests the lack of discourse that could bridge the gap between femininity and

experiences of real women. It brings forth the incompatibility of ideals and representation, and women's lived reality. It also demonstrates the power of discourse over one's own experiences, the power of the signifier over the signified. In *Daughter of Earth* Marie struggles to overcome the prevalent, internalized Victorian discourse of women as asexual – or whores. The book demonstrates the lack of discourse for understanding female sexuality whereas the vocabulary for describing her experiences as a member of the proletariat and her role as an American is readily available. The problem with these two, as Smedley's narrative points out, is that they ignore the issue of gender.

What Usandizaga calls the confusion of private and public/political agendas actually demonstrates the need to redefine the notion of the public (for is an autobiography not an act of rendering private public?) as well as the political, forerunning the second-wave feminism's slogan of personal being political. *Daughter of Earth* points out that the protagonist's inner psychological conflict is socially constructed, and stems precisely from the dichotic definition of the private as feminine and the public as masculine with its implications on the social roles for women and men. Marie struggles to find balance between these two (for some, to have the cake and eat it), but in case of her first marriage the expected role as a wife and a mother threatens her independence and individuality, and result in two illegal abortions and divorce. In case of her second marriage her political agency is rendered impossible by the fact that she has been raped by a member of the Indian independence movement, of which act she is made bear the consequences. In both cases, the "personal failure" results from the fact that Marie, as a woman, is not allowed to take charge of her own body and sexuality.

In *Daughter of Earth* the protagonist's inner conflict is thus produced by the external restrictions. The novel points out that first of all, women need to gain full independence and responsibility in regards to their own bodies, and secondly that the whole concept of femininity needs to be de- and reconstructed. From these

matters stem the feminist politics of *Daughter of Earth*, which include the politicization of identity, and the rejection of romance.

4. SUBVERTING THE ROMANCE

It is a truth universally known, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

In this chapter I will focus on subversions of the 19th century romance plot as defined by Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985) in *Writing beyond the Ending*. I will discuss narrative strategies in *Daughter of Earth* in relation to DuPlessis's analysis of the narrative strategies that examine and delegitimize "cultural conventions about male and female, romance and quest, hero and heroine, public and private, individual and collective, but especially conventions of romance as a trope for sex-gender system" (ibid:ix) employed by twentieth-century women writers in *Writing beyond the Ending*. First, however, I want to explain why I chose to read the novel "out of romance." Thus, in the following, I will shortly construct the (embarrassing) past of the reading "I".

A Reader Position for the Road to Romance. When aiming at subversion, we must begin with our own cultural givens, for, literature and all representations create discursive realities, role models, idols, construct our world views, offer us mirrors against which we can reflect upon our own lives and thoughts. I would not go as far as to say that it determines them - for am I not writing this study on a radical dissident precisely to point out that change is possible! – but I hold that literature has affirmative and subversive power. Reliance in literature on dominant discourses can, in Althusserian (1977) terms, function as a state apparatus reinforcing conventional thought, or, it can function as a space where these discourses are challenged and subverted.

I grew up surrounded by popular romance literature within the culture where we knew very early that the most important task of a girl was to find a guy to love. This necessity was constructed first of all, along the heterosexual matrix, and within that matrix it was heavily based on particular notions of femininity and masculinity. Boys were supposed to take initiative, girls were supposed to giggle and accept. In the suburbs of Lahti in the 980's where our understanding of life pretty much centered around teenage sex and alcohol abuse, sexual liberty was granted for the guys. Very clearly and simply, the number of the girls they slept with added to their honour and masculinity whereas the number of guys a girl slept with added to her disgrace or, reputation as a whore as we expressed it.

Everything around me – films and television series, girls' magazines, juvenile literature, friends – seemed obsessed with one single thing: Love. This Love seemed to consist of a heterosexual couple who first exchanged a few looks, and finally kissed – after the guy who was two years older and two inches taller than the girl had rescued her from some sort of trouble. This never became reality in my own life, but undoubtedly effected my understanding of how life was supposed to be. Women, wives and girlfriends, got beaten up all over the place, but still we always believed that with the power of Love we could change it in our own relationships. We would not share other women's destiny – we had a goal, and that was to Love and get Loved.

It is out of this context that I chose to write on the subversions of the romance plot in *Daughter of Earth*. I was shaped by the not-very-cultivated environment I grew up in, which reinforced the notion of love as the centre of human existence. Thus, I learned to read female plots in literature through romance. Marie's early experiences in *Daughter of Earth* seem to stem from a similar obsession with and pressure for heterosexual matrimony. She grows out of them – and I will here read her way out.

At the time I am writing this more and more representations of women as agents, professionals, friends and groups of friends are appearing on television and literature. The possibility to register homosexual relationships is (finally, and sometimes in outrageously backward terms) being discussed by the Finnish Parliament. Still, most little girls seem to discuss and aim at being loved by boys. Since I live and have grown up in a culture that promotes and cultivates romance, it seems appropriate to take that as a starting point of my analysis.

Analytic Frame. DuPlessis (1985) uses the term romance or marriage plot in reference to a story where narrative action centers around the formation of a heterosexual couple and conjugal love is seen as its telos (ibid:200). This plot dominates many of the most famous 19th century novels from the work of Jane Austen to Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary and Jane Eyre. The term “female plot” refers to the narrative actions of the female hero, and “quest” to goal-orientated search with stages and obstacles leading to self-realization (ibid:200). In my analysis, I will use the term “plot” to refer to a number of different story lines, the development of Marie’s relationship to and attitudes towards the couple, marriage, family, education, religion and the judicial system of the early 20th century United States.

DuPlessis points out that in the conventional nineteenth century novel, the plot offered practically one appropriated quest and goal for a female protagonist: the marriage. The female plot was constructed around the formation of a heterosexual couple, and ended in marriage. In case, however, the female protagonist was fool enough to try and pursue, for example, happiness, profession, intellectual activities (outside heterosexual courtship or activities aiming for one), social agency, independence, or sexual liberty or satisfaction, a punishment followed. In one way or another, it took the form of deprivation of love. The female protagonist could, for example, simply die, or would lose her mind, her child or some other beloved person, financial security, social rank or become ruined in some other way. Other plots were subordinated to the pursuit of love – or, at least a husband - and this was

the role whereby a woman protagonist could, momentarily, obtain agency. The holy matrimony sealed her destiny as a wife and a mother.

DuPlessis analyses the narrative strategies whereby 20th century women writers have subverted the conventions of the 19th century plots. One of the means of doing this is to expand the story beyond the ending, beyond marriage. She also sees twentieth century women writers reach away from the couple, the family and society “as we construe it”. In the following, I will examine these moves in *Daughter of Earth*. DuPlessis analyses these in a slightly different manner evoking discussion on the usage of collective protagonists and utopies of future societies as subversive narrative strategies, but as I regard *Daughter of Earth* as an individualist and realistic *Bildungsroman*, I will merely borrow DuPlessis’s idea of moving beyond and away from the couple, family and society, and apply them to my own analysis of the novel.

As the story reaches well beyond Marie’s first (sic!) marriage, and ends with her separation from the second husband, *Daughter of Earth* rejects the couple. Also, Marie refuses to follow in her mother’s footsteps after whose death and, instead of taking up her mother’s place, abandons her family leaving her two brothers with her drunkard father in order to find education and work. Finally, Marie’s decision to leave her native country that deprived her family decent living conditions marks the rejection of society.

4.1 Beyond The Couple

As Marie, Smedley’s alter ego, coming from an extremely poor background does not turn out to be a rich inheritor, she has to earn her own living till the end. This, however, is also a conscious decision. One of the main ideas in *Daughter of Earth* is that marriage is only a socially appropriated form of prostitution whereby a woman not only sells out her body, but also her emotions in the pact of marriage for economic maintenance. Marie rejects this idea of financial dependency on men in every phase of her life. Nevertheless, after a series of odd jobs as a stenographer

and sales woman, and occasional periods of study, it is marriage that Marie finds herself in.

Smedley builds up expectations for a traditional romance plot by a scene where Marie rides into desert with Knut in the moonlight. Marie's horse shies at something in the dark, Knut brings the horse under control. Marie is seized by fear, her legs tremble, and as Knut soothes the horses, she sinks in the shadow of a sage-bush. In the darkness, they embrace: "His lips were as caressingly tender as the moonlight falling on a quiet sheet of water." (*DE*, 121-2) This scene, however, is immediately followed by the narrator's speculations on love and marriage as a humiliation for a woman that efficiently undermines the reader's expectations of a conventional love plot. She also evokes intertextual links stating that love is "a confused, colourful mingling of fairytales I had read as a child and novels I had read later on." (*DE*, 123)

Marie, however, decides to marry Knut. The wedding (*DE*, 127-9) is a parody, a grotesque description of Marie and Knut, the husband-to-be, giggling at their abrupt decision to actually get married in a magistrate. They are wedded in the holy matrimony by a "little, round, perspiring man" with another little man, also "fat, round and perspiring" serving as a witness. The importance of the moment is undermined in several ways. Marie and Knut's desperate efforts to control their laughter throughout the ceremony are described in detail. The official's inquiry about Knut's willingness to marry Marie is put forth abruptly and without ceremony, and as Knut fails to answer immediately, the official asks him: "What do you want me to do – do the hula-hula?" When inquired about her willingness to marry Knut, Marie feels very uncertain, hesitates, and answers "Yes, I guess so" only after Knut urges her to "say yes and then we'll get out of here." The official, however, a romantic man as he is, is not satisfied with the couple's attitude, and poses Knut another question: "Aire you willin' to support this woman though all the vicissitooedes [sic] of life, through sunshine and rain, through storm and stress?" Marie does not understand what "vicissitooedes" means, and her uncertainty about

the meaning of the word, to my understanding, symbolizes her uncertainty about the meaning of the whole situation and marriage. (She suspects that “vicissitooedes” have something to do with sex, a thing that she fears.) As there are no rings to exchange (“We don’t believe in rings!”) they leave, having both paid half of the five dollars for the service, the official says: “And the next time you come here... be prepared! Marriage is a serious business!” – A contradictory sentence that undermines its own message. Outside the magistrate, Marie states that she does not feel natural at all, and Knut suggests that she will feel more natural after a “feed” – and then he will rush for a train that will take him to work in another town for eight months.

So, to a reader expecting a traditional romance plot, where marriage is the primary goal of a female protagonist, a fulfillment of her destiny and dreams, Marie’s wedding is rather disappointing. She has rather drifted into marriage than pursued it, she is hesitant throughout the ceremony, and the situation is anything but romantic – or natural, and instead of living happily together ever-after, Knut leaves, and Marie continues to work. The anti-climatic nature of the marriage scene is created by the usage of humour and irony, Marie’s uncertainty and haphazardness of the couple’s decision to marry in the first place. All this undermines the dominant discourse of marriage as an important and serious institution (the cornerstone of society), which is evoked and represented by the official, whose authority is questioned by his small size, informal dialect, and the occasional absurdity of his speech (“hula-hula”).

According to DuPlessis, professional life and love were an incompatible pair in 19th century novels, an either/or choice. In this respect, *Daughter of Earth* seeks resolution, but cannot find one: both of Marie’s marriages end in divorce. In neither case, however, does the divorce result directly from Marie’s professional ambitions, but rather from her gender. The first marriage with Knut ends, as Marie cannot bear the role expectations of a wife. Furthermore, her radical and complete rejection of motherhood is symbolized by her two abortions. The second marriage

with Anand, on the other hand, is rendered impossible by Marie's sexual politics (before the marriage she had several affairs, which Anand becomes jealous of) and her political work in the Indian independence movement. It is thus not love and profession, but rather Marie's sexual politics (that her husbands fail to comprehend) and love that prove incompatible in *Daughter of Earth*. From the triangle of love and sexuality within the framework of heterosexual couple, and profession she chooses profession, which marks her movement beyond the couple, the first strategy of moving beyond the ending analyzed by DuPlessis.

4.2 Beyond The Family

Marie's rejection of the family institution is first of all marked by her decision to leave her family, and not to take charge of her little brothers and sister after her mother's death. Throughout the rest of the book, however, she is haunted by feelings of guilt, which indicates the complexity of the issue: taking charge of the family would have meant endless toil in a both economically and intellectually poor environment, but she could have looked after her little brothers and sister. In leaving this behind, however, she sees a possibility to not only save herself from deprivation, but to save money to rescue her brothers and sister as well. Her rejection of the family institution is emphasized further in her refusal to have a family of her own: she aborts two pregnancies.

In both cases, however, it is the nuclear family and women's domesticated role in it, rather than the idea of responsibility for others and togetherness, that are rejected. In *Daughter of Earth* the concept of family is expanded, as Marie finds a new family among the Indians. While her life with her "own" native family was characterized by dispute, violence, tears and pain, among her new family she finds an atmosphere of tolerance, respect, love, happiness and intellect. And even if materially both of these environments are poor, spiritually the former was a void whereas the latter stands for richness. And whereas Marie's feelings of duty towards her brothers and sister appear to be socially regulated / are created by the social norms and expectations concerning blood ties, she embraces the Indian

community voluntarily, and her feelings of responsibility grow from within her rather than from the outside.

The family plot, or Marie's conception of family, in *Daughter of Earth* is best described in terms of expansion, and follows the movement of Marie's intellectual development from ignorance to knowledge. The more she understands, the broader her concept of family becomes. In *Battle Hymn of China* Smedley (1943) writes: "The first period of life, which had ended with my mother's death [and my departure from home] seemed to have little significance. I had been born and I had existed. I had no goal nor did I know enough to have one". Her life within the nuclear family thus seemed to have no purpose (which evokes the question of what purpose does the nuclear family serve, as nothing good seems to come out of it in *Daughter of Earth*?). With the Indians Marie's life becomes filled with meaning and "[t]o me the Indians became a symbol of my duty and responsibility. They took the place of my father, of my brother who was dead and the brother of whose destiny I was yet uncertain."¹¹ (*DE*, 191). Later in life, and in the beginning of *Daughter of Earth*, on the threshold of her new life, Smedley's / Marie's definition of family is expanded further. It now reaches beyond both the nuclear family and the Indian movement, and embraces all the oppressed people of the earth: "I belong to those who die... exhausted by poverty, victims of wealth and power, fighters in the great cause... For we are of the earth and our struggle is the struggle of earth". (*DE*, 2).

Later, she recalls the poverty-stricken people in the mining camps, she claims her affection for the proletariat (*DE*, 80), and asserting her belongingness to the proletariat, marks her belonging in terms of class:

I now recall with joy those hearty, rough, hairy-chested, unshaven men. I recall the rougher, unhappy men in the mining camps, and their silent, unhappy wives. It is with feeling of sadness and of affection that I think of

¹¹ The fact that family is here gendered masculine will be discussed further later in 5.3 Gendered Belongings: Hateful Women – Family of Men.

them now. But there were years when, in search of what I thought were better, nobler things, I denied these, my people and my family. I forgot the songs they sung – and most of those songs are dead now; I erased their dialect from my tongue; I was ashamed of them and their way of life. But now – yes, I love them; they are part of my blood; they, with all their virtues and their faults, played a great part in forming my way of looking at life. (DE, 81)

4.3 Beyond Society¹²

We were very poor. But that I did not know. For all the world seemed to be just like our home – at least the world of ours that stretched for some two hundred miles across Northern Missouri. (DE, 2)

Whereas Marie's growing social and intellectual awareness led to her embracing the lowly of the earth as her family, the increase of knowledge in relation to social institutions leads to rejection. The former line of development is thus characterized by rapprochement and expansion whereas the latter is defined through growing distance.

DuPlessis discusses the movement away from society 'as we construe it'¹³ in relation to feminist utopias created by twentieth century women writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915). These novels reach from the present to the future, beyond the moment of writing creating post-revolutionary otherworlds. *Daughter of Earth*, on the other hand, rather belongs to the category of social

¹² I will base my notion of American society on Michele Hilmes's lecture on "Gender and The Public Sphere – The Case of Broadcasting", which she gave in Jyväskylä, 5 April, 2000. According to Hilmes, due to the heterogenic population and loose governmental system social norms and cultural assumptions in the United States are based on the vague notions of 'the average' and 'normality'. In 1908-1917 four million immigrants, mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe, arrived in the United States. This was considered a threat by the conservatives of the country, which together with the country's entry into the WWI give rise to a pressure for assimilation and national unity. The radio was introduced in 1922, and it soon started to play an important role in the production and maintenance of cultural hierarchies. The radio stations were all commercial, and, rather than super-imposed role models on people as did the BBC and other national radio broadcasting systems, they introduced the notion of "Americanness" by telling them who they were. The average American thus created and represented in the media, according to Hilmes, was white, middle-class, Christian and male – and, of course, heterosexual. These are the terms attributed to hegemonic power, transmitted by state apparatuses i.e. education.

¹³ DuPlessis (1985:xi). This obscure and questionable "we" situates DuPlessis within the white, Western, middle-class discourse that takes the notion of possessive, heterosexual love and couple as a bases for social organization.

realism than that of science fiction. It concentrates on the analyses of the past and the present, but evokes future dimension as Marie in the beginning of the novel asserts her willingness to continue the endless battle against deprivation.

According to DuPlessis, feminist utopias are often characterized by the usage of collective female protagonist. In *Daughter of Earth* the narrative voice, however, is a rather individualistic autobiographical voice, and in relation to other women, Marie conceives herself mostly in terms of difference. The misery of women is a shared experience, but only momentarily, as when Marie aligns herself with her mother to oppose her father and when she walks out of her mother's funeral together with her aunt Helen, does it function as basis of sisterhood. In other words, Marie only seems to experience shared feelings with other women when she shares their misery, but her struggle to move away from that misery through the rejection of the heterosexual couple and the family as has been discussed above, signifies a movement away from shared experience with other women whose lives are determined and centered around what she wishes to escape. Marie, however, struggles to voice those women's experience, but her feelings of belonging are characterized rather in terms of brotherhood than sisterhood.

Marie's movement beyond and away from (American) society is quite different from the strategies used by the authors DuPlessis analyses, but, again, I will merely apply her terminology to my own analysis of the construction of ideology in *Daughter of Earth*.

An American Dystopia – Or the United States as A Dystopia. *Daughter of Earth* is not a utopia. Rather, it is a dystopia¹⁴, a definition of the world as it should not be. It is social criticism in the form of the novel, based on real events, narrated from a point of view of a working class woman with a proletarian, illiterate background.

¹⁴ In *Women, Love, and Power. Literary and Psychoanalytic perspectives*. Elaine Hoffman Baruch (1991: 207) defines dystopia as looking back *with nostalgia*. In that sense *Daughter of Earth* is not dystopia as it has a strong critical edge, with hope for change. It can, however, be argued that the description of the United States constructs that society as dystopic.

Smedley belonged to those who did not even know what a novel was, who did not conventionally appear in novels, let alone that the narrative voice or the point of view would have been theirs.¹⁵ In *Daughter of Earth* the protagonist and most of the other characters come from the margins of society¹⁶ and the fact that their lives and voices have found their way to a novel already shifts the notion of society off the hegemonic (patriarchal and capitalist) balance.

Nancy Hoffman (1991:172) points out in “A Journey into Knowing” that *Daughter of Earth* with its proletarian realism makes a fracture in the literary canon of the early twentieth century US by comparing it to works of Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Faulkner among others. She bases her argument in the fact that “[p]overty, ignorance, and class exploitation are never novel in Smedley’s drab shacks beyond the tracks or in the Rockefeller-owned mining camps of the West, nor is landscape in any way responsive or nourishing.” Hoffman thereby places *Daughter of Earth* among other leftist women writers of the twenties and thirties (Fielding Burke, Josephine Herbst, Tess Slesinger) who also have dealt with themes such as “class conflict, the strait jacket gender expectations, liberated sexual relations, the pain of childbearing, the search for work, the development of revolutionary politics.” (Ibid:173)

There are, however, aspects in Marie’s narration that soften her social criticism as does the fact that her narrative voice is very personal, first person singular, and the focalizer is always Marie, whom the narrator (the older Marie) often criticizes of being instinctive and emotional. The narrator focuses strictly to the things that happen to her, concentrates on her process of development, and even when a wide

¹⁵ In *Battle Hymn of China* Smedley recalls her first encounter with poetry in a privy, where the book, thin as the paper was, hang in a nail. “A man by the name of Shakespeare had written it but I could make neither tail nor head of it.” So, she placed the volume back to its nail, and only in her twenties did she learn who the author was, and in her forties she read his plays. (BHC:6)

¹⁶ Marie’s – and her family’s – marginality stem from their poverty. It has been estimated that around 1900, when Marie/Smedley’s family lived in the Rockefeller-owned mining towns, around 40 percent of Americans lived in poverty. Her poverty, like the fact that she is a woman, does not make her a member of a minority, but marginalizes her in terms of power, as a political agent, and in literary representations.

range of social issues and politics are dealt with, the protagonist remains in the centre. The narrative voice obtains its power from the fact that the events, activity, people and social malice are real, which Marie strongly emphasizes. On the other hand, the individualism thus created renders her voice particular instead of general, and “domesticates” her experiences.

Due to her class position Marie stays in the margins of society. Her encounters with such social institutions as family, marriage, motherhood, the Christian church, education and governmental politics all result in her rejection of them – or theirs from her. The rejection of the first three institutions form the basis of her socialist feminism whereas the rejection of the latter three seems based on her feminist socialism, which both stem from her personal experience.¹⁷ Next, I will deal with her rejection of the Christian Church, educational system and, in the end, the whole of American society for its capitalism, racism and imperialism.

As the construction of the following analysis was much aided by Smedley’s new account of the period covered *Daughter of Earth* in her later novel, *Battle Hymn of China*, I have used quotations from that instead of *Daughter of Earth*.

¹⁷ By socialist feminism I want to emphasize the fact that Smedley’s feminism and her rejection of the heterosexual couple, family and motherhood is influenced and thus characterized by her class consciousness, but they are primarily dealt with on the basis of gender inequality. Christianity, American society on the whole, and especially education, however, are primarily depicted as apparatuses maintaining class oppression, and thereby criticized in socialist terms. In relation to education gender is not really an issue in *Daughter of Earth*, but Christianity and American society are clearly patriarchal. In relation to them, Smedley’s socialism is heavily and inseparably based on her feminism, whereby the term feminist socialism. The complex relationship between Marxism (intrinsically male) and feminism (an umbrella-term for a wide range of political stances) is theorized and discussed e.g. by Catherine MacKinnon in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 1989. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press.

4.3.1 Out of the Church

What I have known of [religion] has made me content that I was not carefully trained in its principles. The virtue of submission to injustice, of rendering unto Caesar that which Caesar did not produce himself, made no impression on me. Beyond that, the belief in immortality has always seemed cowardly to me. When very young I learned that all things die, and all that we wish of good must be won on this earth or not at all. - *Battle Hymn of China*, 6

As Marie's family do not practice any religion, she does not become absorbed into religious discourses and symbolism and feels alienated from the practices of the Christian church.¹⁸ This profound detachment leads to certain ironical lightness in her observations of the actions of its representatives and practices. Her first encounter with Christianity is described in comical terms:

Once we sat about [my aunt's] dinner table. She was handsome and long past forty. Near her sat a thin-faced man, a guest whom it was considered an honour to feed because a minister of religion. When he spoke everyone listened in respectful silence. His power over others impressed me. Just before we started our dinner I saw him bow his head over his plate and clasp his hands together. Everyone did likewise. With closed eyes they listened while he mumbled some words.

'Mammie!' I cried in a shrill voice, 'what's he doing?'

'Sh-h-h!' Her hand crasped my shoulder and shook me.

I ate in a shamed silence, watching the minister in fascination. He ate and ate and ate, and they respectfully pressed him to take more. Then, finished, he pushed his chair back, yawned widely and spread himself in a mighty stretch of satisfaction. The other men also stretched to keep him company. But it was not good bringin' up for women to do so.

Such was my introduction to Christianity, and such was my first encounter with prayer. (*DE*, 11)

This passage portraits Marie's relationship to Christianity in a sarcastic and detached manner, but as we will see later on, the more she learns about it and the closer it comes to influence her life, the more critical and judgmental her attitude

¹⁸ Smedley's notion of Christianity seems to conform with the mid-range American Christianity reproduced in the U.S. radio stations in the 20's as it was outlined by Michele Hilmes on her lecture on broadcasting (Jyväskylä, 5 April 2000). According to Hilmes, this American mainstream Christianity is a vague umbrella term for unspecified protestant – not Jewish or Catholic – belief in God, which avoids any hint of fundamentalism. In most cases, Smedley's conception of Christianity also remains unattached from any particular sect, and appears as one singular category and discourse.

towards it grows. To Marie, religion is one of the hegemonic institutions that maintain and construct hierarchical socio-economic and cultural power relations, and as such, suppresses the voice of the lowly who have not adopted the discourse of submitting themselves to the will of God, or any superior power.

Here, the “minister of religion” is described in terms of power: he is in charge of the pantomime that takes place in silence only broken by little Marie’s cry of terror. What the priest says does not seem important, it is the mimicry the other men practice around him that seems to count. Even the prayer is described as “mumbl[ing] some words”. Still, it is his “congregation” who feed him – he himself lives out of other’s tables. This, in a poor, rural community where life evolves around the production of food requiring excessive labour, is a great sacrifice. The priest’s hierarchical positioning in relation to the other’s (an unnamed and undepicted crowd) is underlined by the usage of words “*minister* of religion”. The decision to begin the depiction of prayer with the phrase ‘I saw’ both emphasizes the description being Marie’s perspective and places her outside the action: she is an observer, distanced, uncomprehending, if not detached.

The incomprehensibility of Christianity is emphasized by the fact that Marie does not understand the minister’s speech. Discourses are transmitted and maintained through words that also a great deal of Christian practices rely on. Prayer and the Bible consist of “words of God” that minister of religion, as the mouthpiece of God, is supposed to deliver and interpret to his [sic!] “herd”. Here the words remain incomprehensible. Furthermore, Christianity is supposed to bring comfort and relief to people; the feelings created in Marie by the priest’s actions are those of angry or fearful amazement and shame. Finally, as it is only the men who stretch to keep the priest company, Christianity is here constructed as an intrinsically male institution where men play an active part. The fact that it is Marie’s mother who silences her symbolizes the mother’s role as a bearer of patriarchal tradition onto the next generation.

Marie is even further alienated from religion as later on, in Trinidad, the flood washes away the Rogers' home, and they seek shelter from the section-house. (*DE*, 35-37) In Trinidad, the Rogers' tent, their home with their few belongings lies on the land between the railway tracks and the Purgatory River. In the springtime, the river overflows one night and washes away their and many other people's homes beyond the tracks. The Roger family is scarcely saved, and having had to cross a ditch already filled with water, they are scared and wet when seeking shelter from the section house.

Yes, the section master said, we could stay on the front porch. His wife came out; we need not be frightened, she assured us, for although the water was rising, yet the section house was built on high ground and would not be swept away. Even if water surrounded it, still it would stand. She was a pious Catholic and had been praying all night and she put her faith in God against the might of the flood.[...] The pious woman smiled and when she walked it was softly and languidly, like an animal that has eaten until sated. Occasionally she would come out to say a few words to us, then retire to her bedroom to pray. (*DE*, 36-37).¹⁹

The family spends the night on the porch, "the night air was cold on the verandah, my father was wet to waist, and we were all but half dressed". (*DE*, 37). In desperation, they watch their tent sail away with the rolling waters.

'Everything we've got in the world is gone... my featherbeds, th' machine, th' clock, Helen's clothes... we've got nothin' but th' clothes on our backs!' [...]

The Morning came. Then the pious woman came from the house and smiled reassuringly at us shivering on the verandah. The flood was rapidly receding, she announced. The mercy of God and the power of prayer were proved – God had saved the section-house. (*DE*, 37)

It is hardly the power of God or prayer that save the section-house. The house is built on high land on the 'right' side of the tracks where the rich can afford to live and to build their houses with proper foundations. As the passage suggests, on this material basis, they can also afford to concentrate on the spiritual world – and to

¹⁹ The attitude of the section master's wife conforms neatly to the ideas promoted by the late 19th century Charity Organization Societies according to which material relief to the poor damaged work ethic and increased pauperism. "The real condemnation of relief-giving is that it is material, that it seeks material means, and therefore must fail. .. For man is a spiritual being, and if he is to be helped, it must be by spiritual means." – Josephine Lowel Shaw, quoted by Patterson in *America's Struggle against Poverty 1900-1980* (1981:21).

close their eyes from the pains of the earthly pagans. For the priest's wife the flood only seems to have symbolic meaning: its primary function is to prove her faith right, whereas for Marie's mother and family it means loss of their belongings, their scarce material security, the bases of their living.

The conflict is depicted through the relations between women. The priest's wife embodies the hypocrisy of Christian piety; Marie's mother voices the family's desperation over the loss of their home by naming the lost things one by one. Also, Marie's mother and Aunt Helen express their resentment and suspicion of the Catholicism represented by the section-master's wife through their silent withdrawal. This is only one of the occasions where Smedley uses female figures to present hostility between classes, and I will discuss this point further in the next chapter.

Marie's final rejection of Christianity takes place in her mother's funeral, where an "ignorant, crude and vulgar" priest "looked accusingly at us all" and states that "God had punished us by taking my mother away from us, but He would punish us still more!" (*DE*, 88-9). Marie's father, who has got a taste for ceremony, repents and kneels at the preacher's feet, but Marie follows her Aunt Helen out of the church. Their protest symbolizes the rejection of both patriarchy and the church, embraced by the father.

4.3.2 Out of the School

I have always believed that had I had some basic knowledge of science, mathematics, literature, and language, I would have been better equipped to meet life. I have long felt that then poverty and ignorance of my youth were the tribute which I, like millions of others, paid to “private interests.”[...]Education seemed to consist of reading books, but just which I did not know. For years I groped, reading anything between covers, often understanding hardly a sentence, but believing mystically that the key to knowledge lay buried in words. [...] If I disliked a person, my mind closed and I could learn nothing from him. So I took from schools and from life what I found interesting, not what people thought good for me.

- *Battle Hymn of China*, 5

Marie’s relation to education is more complicated than her straightforward rejection of Christianity. She is eager to learn, but due to the poverty of Marie’s family, her education becomes somewhat haphazard, and is interrupted on several occasions because she needs to earn money for the family. Despite the fact that she never finishes grade school or attends high school, she, however, manages to get in college and even at university.

In the course of time, however, she grows aware of the fact that education is one of the State apparatuses that produce and maintain ideological hegemonies as well as hegemonic ideologies. During a period of over two decades, with several different teachers within and outside educational institutions, she learns that “knowledge” is always situated within time and place, and that history and all other writing is written from a point of view determined by the author’s political aims. Marie’s learning process is dialogical, she learns from and with Others whose Otherness in relation to her is most importantly marked in terms of class and geography.

When Marie is nearly ten years old, her family moves to Trinidad, a city of five thousand inhabitants in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, and she starts to attend school regularly. This is the moment where the realities and consequences of class division start to mark her life. The family lives in a tent “on the low land between the railway tracks and the back yards of a row of little two- and three-room houses”. (*DE*, 27). The railway divides the town, Marie’s family, like the

other poor, live beyond the tracks; the other side is occupied by the rich, and that is where Marie's school is located. Crossing the railway, attending the grade school, thus means daily crossing of the spatially, linguistically, and materially (e.g. by clothing) marked and constructed class boundaries:

Each day I took my little brother George by the hand and guided him [to school] and we knew we were treading holy ground, for my mother constantly spoke of it as such. The teachers were clean and seemed smoothly ironed; they wore tailored suits and white waists and spoke a language I could at first hardly understand. (*DE*, 30)

Marie's classmates are all well dressed as well, and she feels very humble at school. Numbers cause her trouble, but her eagerness to learn and the kindness of her teacher prevent her feeling completely alienated in the class[!]-room. By the end of the year Marie has gained herself the seat of honour where the best pupil in the class sits. After the flood, however, Marie has to start working to help her poverty-stricken family: she becomes a hired girl. This marks a starting point for a long period of occasional jobs and school. The family also moves often, which makes her schooling even more desultory. At the age of fifteen, however, she manages to become a teacher in New Mexico, but her mother's death interrupts her teaching career, and she never resumes it.

In New Mexico Marie starts correspondence with a man called Roger Hampton whose name she finds in a housewife's magazine on list of people wanting to exchange picture post cards. Hampton is the first one of Marie's "tutors".²⁰ Hampton is a "learned man – in my eyes!" for he is just finishing high school, and lives in Columbus, Ohio, far back East. Marie has "great ideas of the beauty and learning and culture of cities" and as Hampton starts to send her his old books, she falls in love with her "distant hero". He becomes her "ideal who guided my life". (*DE*, 82-4).

²⁰ As I have stated before, Marie's education consists of learning both within and outside educational institutions. Hampton is the first, American one and Sardar Ranjit Singh his Indian counterpart, but in between there are the Larsens, the touch of Europe. Geographically, Marie's intellectual development is characterized by eastward movement the American West representing a void of wisdom found in the East.

Distance plays an important role in Marie's relationship to Roger Hampton. It evokes her interest and maintains her admiration, but when, years later, after her first marriage, development of her socialist politics, and a period of university studies, she actually meets him, he turns out to embody what Marie most despises.

He is a devout Christian, keeping books in a big grocery concern, and a proud subscriber of *Saturday Evening Post* (because the magazine has "such a [large] circulation and... such expensive advertisements".) Hampton's views are conservative, and he is convinced that socialism and the I.W.W., Industrial Workers of the World ²¹, which Marie (provocatively) claims she is thinking of joining, "would destroy the home and the purity of women". Marie, who has just visited her Aunt Helen, an aged prostitute, who in former times provided living for Marie's family by selling her body, claims, that they did not destroy her home, nor the "purity" of her aunt – "yet they were destroyed". She moves on to question purity, and after a long silence Hampton says: "I thought you'd be different". The hero has shrunk (he turns out to be a tiny man), he comes to represent a lost ideal – happily rejected, and the realization that she has outgrown this man (he asks her to send him her books) marks the end of one phase in Marie's development. She gets on a train, and moves on farther East, to New York. "I looked back. He was standing under the gas light and his shabby coat seemed ready to slide off his shoulders. A loose button hung by a thread, and when the wind caught it, it twirled and twirled". (*DE*, 149-53).

Roger Hampton stands for formal education, unquestioning adoption of mainstream knowledge and values. In one word, he is dull, and like the button hanging on his

²¹ Industrial Workers of the World, a socialist-syndicalist movement, founded in 1905 as an offshoot of the Socialist movement, was strong in the West, and aimed at "more transient and less stable constituency than main-stream Socialists, depreciating methodological practical programs and emphasizing "revolutionary" demands for higher wages, shorter hours, and improved working conditions." By 1916 the I.W.W had failed as an organized movement. (MacKinnon, and MacKinnon 1989: 26).

shabby coat he is stuck in his forlorn life and ideas.²² The basic knowledge that he represents, and which he has provided for Marie by sending her his old books, however, have been an elementary basis for the construction of more complicated ideas, which she has developed by the time they meet. In the books that Roger Hampton had given her Marie found some of that “basic knowledge of science, mathematics, literature, and language...that equipped [her] to meet life”. (*Battle Hymn of China*, 5). Marie understands and insists that in order to be critical one needs a sound basis in knowledge, but by the time they meet, she has also learnt that they are not enough.

The years between her mother’s death and the meeting with Hampton are of great significance for the development of Marie’s social awareness, her socialist politics and independence. After her mother’s death Marie learns stenography, works as a magazine agent, and, supported by an old family friend, manages to spend a year at Tempe Normal School²³ in Phoenix, Arizona. There she becomes editor-in-chief of the school magazine, and most importantly, meets Karin Larsen who has come to hear a debate on woman suffrage. This encounter is yet another turning point in Marie’s life. Karin and her brother Knut, who is to become Marie’s first husband, are the first socialists Marie comes to know, and the first to provide her with a theory to understand, and a policy to fight, the social maladies she so far has reacted to with righteous indignation.

Karin and Knut Larsen are New Yorkers who have come to the West to work. Karin has followed her brother to Phoenix “to be close to her brother and to see a bit of life”. (*DE*, 119). They are sophisticated, well-educated and very close, and “their feet were planted firmly on sound knowledge, and from the heights they

²² The wind is an important metaphor in *Daughter of Earth* representing Marie’s will to freedom and independence. The wind is her friend, she despises stability which is associated with immanence and femininity. Roger Hampton is thus rendered feminine in a derogative sense.

²³ Normal school was a training institution for elementary school teachers. According to *Encyclopedia International*, the training of one, two or three years consisted of a review of elementary school subjects, study of some secondary subjects, a survey of principles of teaching, classroom observation, and practice-teaching.

could afford to be critical". (*DE*, 121). Before meeting these two, Marie has never thought that there "could be anything wrong with a school of any kind". Karin on the other hand is "a funny person – a teacher with no respect for teaching, who said she was made to teach things she knew nothing about". According to Karin, educational institutions in general seem to be "antiquated, reactionary and uncreative – static." Also, "she spoke of 'society', and I learned that she didn't mean fashionable society people, but everybody, including myself". Karin and Knut seem to see "beyond physical appearances and to be watching what I didn't understand". (*DE*, 119).

The Larsens evoke and strengthen Marie's willingness to pursue knowledge, and when she no longer has funds to pursue her studies, she decides to follow them to San Francisco. During her marriage with Knut Marie works, but after her first abortion she joins school again. This time, her studies last for three years. She seems unhappy, and is disliked by others due to her feminist politics, neglect of her looks and refusal to be called Mrs. Larsen, but she works hard, even if without much joy. At the same time as she works to earn her living, she works with "a fear of desperation, burdened with mental and spiritual conflicts that were more devastating than pain or hunger", and is driven forth by the possibility of earning a diploma, and a chance to help her sister and brothers. (*DE*, 136). Marie graduates, and with her first salary she is able to send for her sister, Beatrice, to join her.

With Beatrice Marie is admitted to the University of California for the summer term. Here, the issue of racism is brought up. Marie, white with a touch of Indian blood from her father's side, stands up in the lecture hall to challenge a student who claims the inferiority of the Negro. The professor is merely amused, but Marie, defeated primarily by the rage over her inability to argue constructively, goes home to write her first article on Asia – "an essay on the contribution of the Chinese made to civilization when the white race was savage!" (*DE*, 141). Marie, however, enjoys her studies, but the trouble is all but over. She becomes pregnant again, aborts the child, is divorced and expelled from the university California on the

grounds that she is a Socialist, has been seen with men in the city and had let other girls in the school “to read books that were not proper – Ellen Key’s ‘Love and Marriage’ and such things”. She is regarded as having a bad influence on others, including her sister. (*DE*, 145). She ends up in New York, to stay with Karin to begin with, works attends evening classes at university, but never receives a degree.

Marie’s studies in educational institutions are always motivated by a chance to gain a diploma and to help her family therein. In *Daughter of Earth*, the contents of her studies in formal education are not foreground. She meets her most significant and influential teachers in these institutions, but they are all highly critical and often rejected by these institutions. Bot the Larsens and Sardar Ranjit Singh, a leading figure of the over-seas Indian independence movement who will be the most influential of Marie’s teachers, point out the limitedness of the contents and point of view of the teaching. The Larsen’s introduce Marie to Socialism, Sardar Ranjit Singh teaches Marie about the history of India and its struggle to liberate itself from the British rule.

Marie’s relationship to learning and knowledge is passionate, and wherever she senses that people around her know more than she does, she feels very humble. To emphasize the power of knowledge, and despite her rejection of Christianity, education evokes religious language throughout the book. When she first goes to school she “knows” that she is “treading holy ground, for my mother always spoke of it as such”. (*DE*, 30). The normal school near Phoenix springs “out of the desert like a mirage” (*DE*, 115), and even if Marie describes her entrance in the University of California in terms of “opening the pages of a fairy-tale”, her passing through “the great iron gates” suggests that she is, again, stepping on holy ground, if not approaching the promised land (*DE*, 141).

Also, her encounters with her “private” teachers evoke language of divinity. Marie rejects the god of Christianity, but her private teachers are repeatedly compared and contrasted to gods. Roger Hampton, however, may only have thought of being one:

he “must have felt like a god, he sitting back there reading the humble, groping, scrawling letters from a lonely canyon in the Rocky mountains”. (*DE*, 84). Karin Larsen, on the other hand, looks like a goddess: “She was a Scandinavian Goddess, an unusually tall, dignified goddess with golden hair, blue eyes and the hint of an accent in her speech.” She, however, limps (a suggestive indication of a fault), and resembles a fictive figure: “such women existed in books... tall, pale, of natural gentility and dignity. And some of them limped, if I remembered rightly, and some were rich”. (*DE*, 118). These figures turn out human, and Roger Hampton even as pitiable as to deserve a remark: “death was better than his life – and perhaps he knew it” as he writes a patriotic letter to Marie, informing her of his decision to enlist, and go to the WWI. (*DE*, 165).

But “when knowledge and love become one, a force has been created that nothing can break”. (*DE*, 176). This is the lesson Marie, among other things, learns with Sardar Ranjit Singh, the encounter with whom is described in straight-forwardly intertextual terms with the Bible: “I was ignorant, and Ranjit Singh gave me knowledge. I was rough and often cynical, and he taught me that roughness was fear and cynicism defeat”. (*DE*, 176). Here, the syntax renders the sentence in direct dialogue with a passage in The New Testament (Prophecies and Warnings, Matthew 25:31-41), and the words of the “Son of Man”: “For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; I was a stranger, you took into your home, when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me”. Ranjit Singh is thus compared with Jesus, whose followers are promised an eternal life in Paradise. The Christian Paradise, however, follows from surrendering oneself to the will of God; Ranjit Singh’s “Paradise” calls for a fight against India’s subjection by the British Rulers. Ranjit Singh is also compared with Cassius (*DE*, 176), the chief conspirator against Julius Caesar, whereby comparison between the British and the Roman Empires is drawn. All this emphasizes the importance of Ranjit Singh for Marie. Furthermore, it points out the functioning of discourses in our thinking even when we reject and resent those discourses. Also, it radically questions the basis of Western culture pointing out

that its roots lie in imperialism, and thereby in the subjection of other peoples, whose liberation would benefit the whole of the earth. The liberation of the subjected countries and people would bring the paradise on earth.

Ranjit Singh becomes Marie's tutor, he begins to teach Marie about India preparing her to become a teacher in India, and again, Marie feels very humble in front of him, his knowledge, and wisdom. "In him I saw reflected all that I had not been, all that most of my own people were not; thoughtfulness and humanity; the passionate longing for freedom for all men [sic!] combined with a love for his own land; and the use of knowledge for good ends". (*DE*, 176). Their encounter is brief, lasting only for a few months, but during that time Marie becomes deeply involved in the Indian independence movement. She quits her job, and begins to work as Ranjit Singh's secretary during the days and studies with him and other Indians in the evenings.

Whereas the Larsens pointed out the impact of class on the production and reproduction of knowledge in education, Ranjit Singh teaches Marie about the impact of world politics on the teachings at university where she continues to attend evening classes on economics and history. Sardarji points out that Marie's studies on the social history of England are "incomplete without the study of the influence of India upon English development. England's wealth began with the plunder of India". (*DE*, 176). Ranjit Singh starts to teach Marie and the Indians living in and passing by his apartment about the history and life in India. A new world opens up in front of Marie, and her discussions with "Sardarji" – a title of respect with which Marie and Ranjit's other students call him - outline her politics as well as point out her growing awareness of her own Americanness.

4.3.3 Out of the Nation

Love my country, Sardarji – do you mean the soil? Yes, I love that. I love the mountains of the West. And I love the deserts. But what most people mean by country is the government and the powerful men who rule it. No I don't love them. But the earth –yes. This is our earth. Or- it must one day be.

[...]

But I would not want to work just to put it in the hands of a few rich men or groups who would make the rest of us work for them and live in poverty – and call it “our” country. Today this is not our country, but their country. We are permitted to live only so long as we submit to them. (*DE*, 183)

The passage above outlines Marie's attitude and sentiments towards her country. It points out the distinction she makes between the country capitalists rulers of her whom she resents and despises, and the land and the nation to which she belongs to. It depicts her as a nationalist (epistemologically, the word nation is derived from the Latin word *natus* 'born', connoting birth and thus femininity through the mother) as opposed to a patriot (from the Latin *pater* 'father' and *patria* 'native country' connoting fatherhood, masculinity, and through 'patron', ownership).²⁴ It, again, reveals her socialist politics, and thus opposes her to the capitalist rulers. These same issues are brought up in the interrogations that follow her arrest later.

As she starts to study with Sardarji, the Independence movement becomes Marie's family. The deeper she becomes involved in the movement, the more she starts to project the feelings of guilt of deserting her own brothers to her new family. After Sardarji leaves New York, Marie continues to meet and study with the young men in the movement, and when the political hunts by the British espionage begin, she is trusted with the names and addresses of men working for the Indian independence movement. She is very afraid, but remembering her dead brother, she decides to take the risk, and thus seals her belonging and commitment to the movement:

²⁴ Marie, like a number of other Socialists, even supported Thomas Woodrow Wilson, the candidate of the Democratic party, in the presidential election in 1916 due to his efforts to prevent the United States's involvement in the WW I.

I recalled that once I had deserted my little brothers who needed my help and my protection. I had been selfish and in my drive to save myself had sacrificed them.

Then I took the notebook in my hand and decided that I would not again desert anyone who trusted and needed me. To me the Indians became a symbol of my duty and responsibility. They took the place of my father, of my brother who was dead and of the brother whose destiny I was as yet uncertain. (*DE*, 191)

Marie's imprisonment is the final seal for her anti-governmental sentiments, and the same themes that characterize her rejection of American society on the whole are, once again, brought up. Her interrogators claim the representation of the country: "Young woman – this is wartime and it is dangerous to play with the United States!" Marie lashes back stating that she is "as much part of the United States" as they are. The interrogators also express overt racism by calling the Indians "yellow dogs" that she has been "running around with", and they suggest that she has been prostituting herself with the Indians. They appeal to her by saying that they, too could give her money for her "*services*", and that, married men as they are, would not be shocked by anything related to sex. (*DE*, 204-5).

During the interrogations they constantly appeal to her Americanness and whiteness, whereby they construct whiteness as a basic, racist constituent of Americanness. They also try to win her over by offering her money and freedom. They themselves represent the rich, white, male hegemony that again deprives Marie from freedom and nourishment. She is kept in a cold, wet jail, and is given no drink or food, which connotes her childhood experiences. Her interrogators also threaten to cause trouble to her young brother, Dan, who having not been able to find work, has enlisted to the army. All this only reinforces Marie's resentment of the rulers of her country, and her anti-"American" stance is sealed when she meets Talvar Singh, another arrested member of the Indian movement, in court. The interrogators again appeal to her whiteness and womanhood, giving her the one last chance to "help [her] country".

They told me I was a white woman! So was my mother who lay under the earth [and died from undernourishment, poverty and disease]... so was Helen [Marie's aunt, who prostituted herself to provide living for her

sister's family]... so were all the Helens and the mothers of my class! My country! *Their* Country!

'Think of your country!' the official cried again.

'*You* are not my country!... I've done nothing wrong... you are indicting me because I help men who are trying to get their freedom – as America once got its freedom!'²⁵

'These men are German spies!'²⁶

'No – no more than Benjamin Franklin was a *French* spy.' (DE, 216)

Referring to the old man who signs the indictment against Marie, she states: "It ... so seemed strange that the gulf can be so deep between people – as between me and that old man. My countrymen – no, a stranger to me... strange creatures that I did not understand." (DE, 217). Before she is removed from court, and is sent to prison, Marie exchanges one word with Talvar Singh: "*Bahin*" means sister.

To summarize, Marie's rejection of American society is based on the poverty, which she experiences especially as a child and which results from the unequal and unjust distribution of wealth in the capitalist United States. This poverty deprives her from proper education, nourishment, and leads to the death of her mother and her younger brother George. It drives her Aunt Helen to prostitution, and her father to alcoholism. The same capitalist state that boasts freedom of speech denies Emma Goldman the right to speak on the social drama when Marie studied in the Normal School (DE, 136), and prevents Sardar Ranjit Singh from lecturing on India at the University of California (DE, 144).²⁷ Furthermore, the whole system is based on

²⁵ Here, Marie refers to the fact that her interrogators are actually serving the British government, the former ruler of the United States, and her appeal is to evoke common American anti-English sentiments in her interrogators.

²⁶ As the WWI was on, and the British and the United States fought on the side of the Allies, any act against the British rule were regarded as abetting the German enemy. (MacKinnon and MacKinnon (1988:46)).

²⁷ According to the *Encyclopedia International*, the 'domestic troubles, particularly labour conflicts and strikes in the early decades of the [20th] century; the emergence of radicalism at the same time; wars and the fear of internal subversion; and the growing suspicions and intolerance of critics of society' led to legislative restrictions during and after the WWI. The incidents depicted in *Daughter of Earth* thereby reflect historical tendencies. Emma Goldman (1869-1940) was a noted speaker, an anarchist and a personal friend of Smedley's, who was imprisoned in 1917 and deported to the Soviet Union in 1919 wherefrom she later fled. In *Daughter of Earth*, the fact the prevention of her speech by the local business men leads to riots. The cancellation of Ranjit Singh's lecture, on the other hand, is induced by the Board of Trustees of the university.

racist white supremacy, and male dominance, which penetrates all social institutions. Marie, opposing to all this, thus rejects family and motherhood. She quits both of her marriages, walks out of the church which preaches submission, is expelled from the university, and imprisoned by the government. Finally, she leaves the country. Before this final rejection she, however, engages herself in counter-governmental action by joining the Socialist party, I.W.W., Indian independence and Birth Control movements working for and, as a journalist, giving voice to those otherwise deprived from it: prisoners, immigrants, the proletariat, and women.

5. IDENTITY AS/AT WORK

I shall gather up the fragments of my life and make a crazy-quilt of them.
Or a mosaic of interesting pattern – unity in diversity. This will be an
adventure.
(DE, 2)

In this chapter, I will first discuss identity as a gendered, raced, classed and ethnic notion. I will discuss Marie's gender identification in relation to her parents, and point out how these are later projected into her identifications and portrayals of other characters. I will draw attention to the discourses that shape that identity, the positions that she takes and the Others that she creates in the process of construction. At some points, my analysis and the issues I deal with overlap with my discussion and the issues I dealt with in the previous chapter. The angle, however, is different: in the previous chapter I approached *Daughter of Earth* from the point of view of narrative strategies and the ways in which Smedley overwrites the narrative conventions of the Victorian romance plot; here, I will look at how her notion of identity relates to some contemporary thinkers views. Also, in this chapter, I will pay special attention to the ways and processes whereby she creates her gender identity, and discuss its implications. First, however, I need to clarify the notion of identity.

5.1 Forging a Self – Stitching Up a Quilt

According to Oxford English Dictionary (1989) the word ‘identity’ derives from the Latin word *idem* ‘same.’ In OED, identity is defined as the “quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness, oneness.” The second definition refers more directly to personality: “The *sameness of a person* or thing *at all times or in all circumstances* [my emphasis] the condition of or fact that a person or a thing is itself and *not something else*; individuality; personality.” These two definitions of identity emphasize “being”, “sameness” and “permanence”, and thus reproduce the modernist, Cartesian view of the subject as stable and unitary with no notion of the influence of changing point of view, limited access to reality, fragmentation or narration. As such, this notion of identity is thus of no use in this context, and serves only as a point of reference/rejection.

My notion of identity is fluid and discursive. It is based on Foucauldian tradition, and on the idea that nothing but change is its permanent constitutive. As such, it resembles Stuart Hall’s (1996:4) understanding of identity. For him, identities are about becoming rather than being, and they are constructed by “using the resources of history, language and culture”. For Hall, the crucial questions in the process of constructing an identity are “not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we are from’, so much as *what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves* (my emphasis). Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation.” This captures a point crucial to *Daughter of Earth*, the writing of which Smedley in *Battle Hymn of China* referred to as a “desperate attempt to reorient my life”. (*BHC*, 23). Thus for Smedley, the writing of an autobiographical novel was a process of becoming the autobiographical “I”, a process of negotiation inseparable from representation. Answering the question Hall poses in his title “Who Needs ‘Identity?’”, Smedley’s desperation (she does need it!) also points to the fact that we, as humans, need what he calls “the point[s] of *suture*” for our sanity. Smedley wrote *Daughter of Earth* after her physical and mental health broke down, and the process of narrative construction of identity can

be seen as a process of healing. In *Daughter of Earth*, she stitches up the fragments of her life through the ideological grids that form her worldviews and politics.

2 Hall defines his notion of identity as “the points of *suture*” (which interestingly connote wound) between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.” (Hall 1996:5-6). Hall’s discursive conceptualization is closely linked to Kathryn Woodward’s (1997:1-2) definition of identity as an “interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situations”, which “gives us an idea of who we are and of how we relate to others and to the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not.”

What is important in Woodward’s definition is that it draws attention to disidentification. Our identities – and Marie’s to a large extent as I hope to have pointed out in the previous chapter – are based not only on recognition of sameness, but at least as importantly our difference (imagined or real) from others. Also, she points out that our subject positions are created socially and culturally (and I would add materially), not just discursively. Hall, on the other hand, highlights the temporality of the points of suture, and thus fluidity of the whole notion of identity. He also points out that the subject positions which can be spoken (uttered, voiced, expressed) are created discursively. Thus the available subjectivities are created by discourses and practices, and met, or “hailed”, by the subject in a process of “chaining of the subject into the flow of the discourse”. These points of chaining, the sutures, can be many, and they are called intersections.

In her autobiographical introduction to *Cartographies of Diaspora* Avtar Brah (1996:9-10) discusses the intersectionality of identities insisting on their simultaneity and the impossibility to separate them. She, too, recognizes the fluidity of identities, and brings the materiality of the body, or signature, into discussion. “Throughout, I speak with the authority of ‘I’ and ‘Me’ as if ‘I’ am a pre-given ‘reality’, when the discussion shows how ‘I’ and ‘Me’ have been changing all the time. On the other hand, my signature is possible because there is a *changing core* that I recognize as me [my emphasis].” Brah’s definition, or rather description, brings forth many interesting issues. She points out that the “I” is already encoded in the language that she uses, that there is a pre-given assumption of an “I”, a unity, an embodied entity. At the same time she uses that same language to describe how that ‘I’ has changed. But instead of cancelling each other, these two contradictory processes create a fluid, changing core. Importantly, this core is not a stable given either. No, the very core, materialized in the signature, is in process – just like the body, which embodies our experiences and identities, constantly changes all the time. (I will come back to this point shortly.)

In relation to Marie’s construction of identity, Brah’s discussion brings forth many interesting issues. The fluidity of Marie’s identity becomes evident when we relate it to the feminist theories of identity which take colour, ethnicity, class, sexuality, able-bodiedness as predicates of difference between women – never exhausting the list which, according to Butler (1990:143) always ends with “an embarrassed etc.” In *Daughter of Earth* sex is a given and constantly discursively created as a subject position. Class seems another unwavering basis of Marie’s identity, but in fact, it is constructed as such precisely because Marie throughout the book renegotiates her belonging to the class and people whose dialect she has erased from her tongue. As an educated woman, she, in the end, cannot fully belong to the working class community – nor can she ever embrace the educated upper-class people who have never known hunger, and tend to idealize the working class.

In relation to the construction of nation²⁸, Marie's identity building is subversive: through her identification with the working class and the Indian movement she challenges the predicates assigned for nation – and national identity – suggested by her interrogators. She points out that their notion of Americanness is based on capitalism, which creates class division, and the assumption of white supremacy based on exclusion and suppression of racial others with whom she aligns herself. She thus debases the points of suture offered by the hegemonic discourse of the officers.

All of these identities are evoked in *Daughter of Earth* through encounters and thus in relation to other people. All of them change the autobiographical "I" at the same time as they write it. The core of this "I", the body, changes as well. First and most self-evidently, Marie grows from a young child to a woman. Furthermore, her body assumes different roles, some of which become identities. Her body is the riding body, the harassed body, a source of sexual pleasure, a pregnant body, a sick body, a suffering body, and an abused body. Most of the time it is an able body, but on several occasions it is disabled as when she, travelling as a sales woman, starves without money, until she is unable to move from her bed. (*DE*, 101-9). Also, her able-mindedness varies, as she towards the end of the book sinks in deep depression. There is thus no stable, unchanging core to her identity, but rather, a flow of chainings, a diversity of positions brought together in her unfolding narrative.

Brah also draws attention to the intersectionality and inseparability of different political and politicized identities. She emphasizes the fact that 'race', gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity etc. are positions embodied in an individual, but in most

²⁸ In *Gender and Nation* Nira Yuval-Davis (1997: 43) discusses identity in relation to the gendered mechanisms of nation building. According to her "identities – individual and collective – are specific forms of cultural narratives which constitute commonalities between self and others, interpreting their social positioning in more or less stable ways". According to Yuval-Davis these commonalities are often based on myths (which may or may not be historically valid) of common origin, and to myths of common destiny". Yuval-Davis discusses primarily collective identities whereby borderlines between "us" and "them" are drawn.

political struggles, one is made to choose. Referring to her political work, she states that “to be simultaneously concerned about [these different positions] was to lay oneself open to the charge of being ‘divisive’, or ‘diluting the struggle’”. (1996:10). In *Daughter of Earth*, Marie is faced by this same dilemma (238). Due to the sexual double standard for women, in order to take part in the political work both with the American Socialists and the Indian Nationalists she has to conceal her private life and her sexual politics. Her conscious decision and conviction is that women should have and exercise the same sexual liberty as men do. And she does. At the same time, however, she has herself internalized the idea of the shamefulness of female sexuality, and is torn with guilt and self-hatred. “Believing sex experience to be a thing of shame, a disgusting thing, and still having clandestine love affairs, I felt unworthy of the respect shown me by friends.” (238).

The writing of *Daughter of Earth* was thus a chance for Smedley to lay out her politics and all the often-contradictory elements of her identity. In “Journey into Knowing” Nancy Hoffman (1991:172) points out that “schooled in feminism, as well as European Marxist and psychoanalytical practice, and recognizing the contradictions among these perspectives, Smedley used each theory for its explanatory and theoretical power, but embraced none as credo.” Thus at the same time as *Daughter of Earth* argues for women’s right to choose, make choices over their bodies, politics and economy, it defends women’s right not having to choose between their gender and other positions which so often equals compromising gender in favour of class/’race’/sexuality/disability/national struggles to name but a few. This is why, in the following, I will discuss Marie’s identity specifically from the point of view of gender.

5.2 Gendered Identifications

The two family strains, meeting in me, made my spirit a battlefield
across which a civil war raged endlessly.

Battle Hymn of China

In *Mother Daughter Plot* Marianne Hirsch (1989: 10-11) discusses the “Freudian family romance” as a conventional 19th century plot in fiction. According her, “the desire for the heroine’s singularity based on a disidentification from the fate of other women, especially mothers ... and refusal of conventional heterosexual romance and marriage plots and further more their disidentification from conventional constructions of femininity ... whereby [mothers] become the targets of this process...and the primary negative models for the daughters.” This is also the case in *Daughter of Earth*. Smedley’s narrative repeatedly evokes undesirable images of women, especially wives, from whom she wants to distinguish herself. This image of a miserable woman is embodied and symbolized in the figure of her mother, who seems to represent the social construction – and restrictions - of femininity. It is through Hirsch’s argument that I read the opening sentence of *Daughter of Earth*:

Before me stretches the Danish sea. Cold, grey, limitless. There is no horizon. The sea and the grey sky blend and become one. A bird, with outspread wings, takes its way over the depths. (*DE*, 1)

In the image of the bird, I see a self-projection of the narrator, and image of herself as separate, distinguished from the greyness that represents not only femininity and the fate of women, but more widely taken, her background, poverty of her people, childhood, all that which have made her drink “from the wells of bitterness.” (*DE*, 1). For me, this image of a bird stands for assertion of individuality, separatedness – as well as loneliness.

In the following I will discuss the narrative techniques whereby the narrator distinguishes herself from other people, and especially other women. I will start with her parents, who come to represent femininity and masculinity. Along the processes of identifications and disidentifications Smedley creates a gendered and hierarchized dualism between the two. In order to elaborate this point further and to

discuss its consequences, I have, in the following reconstructed a passage where Marie, the narrator, introduces her parents. I have reorganized the text by grouping the statements about the mother, Marie (the I/eye) and the father in their own sections. The purpose for my doing this is to point out the striking dichotomy she creates between them, and thus, more widely understood as becomes evident later in the book, between men and women in general.

MOTHER

My mother came walking down the long path,
carrying two pails of water...
She was barefoot and the wind caught her loose-flowing calico dress and wrapped it close to her slender body.
She was always tapping me with a hard steel thimble
She had gone only to the sixth grade in school
Why she whipped me so often I do not know
But she said that I built fires and that I lied
she whipped me more and more
She developed a method in her whippings
she forced me to stand in one point of my own will
My mother continued to say that I lied

I

I was baby so young I recall only the feeling I must have been no more than a year old
I heard the voice of my father
I talked to [flowers] as I talked to the wind.
I was building a fire. I built the fire on the on the side near the two cedar trees. Now I know the spiritual link between fire and the instinct of love.
I remember my mother's thimble taps.
I remember a tough little switch.
Why [...] I do not know
I doubt if she knew.
I did not know I could hit back.
I longed to grow up. I would plead or cry or run away.
I continued to sob.
I ran from the house screaming for my father. I was little and could not explain. I was never clear. I learned to know what a lie was. I would lie, I would say, yes, I had lied and was sorry.
I learned to tell her only the things I thought she wanted to hear.
I was humiliated. I became hardened. I accepted it as a fact. I am weary of memories of tears and pain.

FATHER

My father was holding me close to his huge body in sleep.
He laboured in the hayfields.
My father's imagination reached to mysterious city called St Joseph
But then he was a man with a soul and imagination of a vagabond.
For he was not one of them; he was almost a foreigner. His family was unknown to our world.
My father did not know – he had gone only to through the third: a man did not need more, he said.
Education was only for women and dudes.
He would not believe.

In this passage her mother is associated with physical, calculated violence (i.e. the beatings). The image of her is bodily and threatening, the mother forces Marie to lie, to stand still while she beats her. It is an image of force, breaking of Marie's own will, killing and suffocating her spirit, her love of freedom, fire and her imagination. The mother thus stands for suppression, whereas the father represents freedom, security. His image is attached to the unknown and luring mysteries. He does not belong to this world, and his immediate surroundings, but reaches further. His possessions are imagination and soul, both of the things that Marie's mother and her sex deny her. Marie, however, loves and hears the wind. She, too, belongs to the world of imaginary, and reaches out to her father, telling him about the beatings, the suppression practiced by her mother. But the father does not hear her, he has the ultimate power not even to believe. Hereby both her parents come out as suppressive: the mother denies Marie's spirit, the father her actual experience.

At this point, both the father and the mother become icons, and start to represent institutions and practices beyond their characters. The mother stands for the female sex, the restrictions of femininity whereas her father represents patriarchy that denies Marie's experience. The immediate violence against Marie is carried out by her mother, which highlights her role in the cultural reproduction of patriarchy, but it is her father's not believing her that conceals her suppression. Thereby Marie, the narrator or I/eye of the passage, is torn by these experiences. Moreover, due to the humiliation and violence she comes to conceive herself as a liar unable to defend herself. She is punished for her building fires, which symbolizes the repression of the instinct of love. Both the narrator and her mother are characterized by ignorance. The father possesses the credible voice, expresses his contempt for women through his scorn for education (the mother is more educated than he is). The narrator is helpless, and characterized by inability to defend herself, her unreliability, passivity, tearfulness and readiness to please.

Marie's object of identification as a woman (bodily identification) is her mother, whereas mentally, she identifies herself with her father's spirit - but not his values!

In the given circumstances, however, it is the body, one's sex that determines the possibilities of other identifications, Marie's "chosen" identifications are mutually exclusive, and thus incompatible. She either has to deny her body, or give up social agency granted for men. As her primary object of identification is the mother who is denied any agency (due to her financial and thus total! dependence on the father, who, on the other hand, is dependent on his employers, and whose frustration about this is directed against his wife, who then beats Marie up.) The mother is characterized in terms of silence, even muteness, hard physical work, submission to her husband, maternity and weeping, all of which Marie wants to avoid and negate. Marie's identity work is thus based on disidentification with negative female role models, which directs her hatred towards her body, and, in the end, is manifested in her self-acknowledged scorn, for other women.

Smedley's construction of femininity and masculinity as embodied in the representation of her parents is closely linked to Simone de Beauvoir's discussion of transcendence and immanence in her ground breaking book *The Second Sex* (1949). de Beauvoir regards transcendence (overcoming oneself, reaching beyond one's present state, achievement and the aim for progress) as a characterizing element of masculinity, and immanence (permanence, stability and maintenance) as characterizing femininity. For de Beauvoir, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one." (Cited in Butler 1991:1). She thus separates femininity from being a woman, and thus gender from sex, as does Smedley in the processes which I have described above.

De Beauvoir's theory has amounted to a whole body of literature, and it has received a great deal of criticism for example from Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray, two of the most prominent contemporary feminist philosophers. In *Gender Trouble* Butler criticizes de Beauvoir on the grounds that "the theory of embodiment informing Beauvoir's analysis is clearly limited by the uncritical reproduction of the Cartesian distinction between freedom and the body... de Beauvoir maintains the mind/body dualism, even as she proposes a synthesis of those terms." (Butler

1990:12). In other words, according to Butler, de Beauvoir values mind over body. Furthermore, she reproduces the Cartesian hierarchization between the body and the mind linking them to “female” and “male”, respectively, thus reproducing what Butler calls a heterosexual matrix. (1990:12). Within this matrix “masculinity” and “femininity” are organized and instituted as oppositional and asymmetrical, and they are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female.” (17). In *Daughter of Earth* Smedley clearly produces this same distinction between the mind and the body, and as in relation to her parents, she associates the mind with masculinity and men while the body, femininity and women inevitably go together. Marie’s Bildung in *Daughter of Earth* is an attempt to overcome this dualism, but both the dualism, hierarchization of the mind and the body as well as the heterosexual matrix are reproduced in the process of constructing them as a point of rejection and in the representation of other women.

In *Daughter of Earth* women, as represented by Marie’s mother, are doomed to immanence and transcendence is reserved for men. Marie’s mother seems tied to earth, and she *wants* to stay on their little farm but it is the father’s decision, his will to power and wealth that force the whole family on the road and to a vagabond life. He pursues his dream and the family suffers. de Beauvoir argued for women’s right to transcendence, to that which creates new things supersedes itself repeatedly de Beauvoir’s point of view is very much middle-class, and thus she talks to, from and about the middle class masculinity and femininity. However, in terms of ideals, her ideas seem to hold truth in the proletarian mining-community of the Rogers family.

Marie’s father, however, fails to perform the expectations accorded to his gender. Unable to transcend himself economically and thereby confirm his masculinity in this way, he starts to act violently towards the *women* of the family: he tries to beat up his wife. The father’s identity based on masculinity is thus primarily dependent on financial success, i.e. it is determined in relation to other men who operate in the same business and public life. His success is measured against and by them. But as

he fails in this competition he starts to build up his masculinity on the basis of his physical superiority in relation to women.

This problematic related to transcendence links *Daughter of Earth* to Luce Irigaray's criticism on de Beauvoir. In *je, tu, nous - Toward a Culture of Difference* Irigaray (1990) argues against de Beauvoir's reproduction of the phallogocentrism of Western thought by maintaining the hierarchization of masculinity over femininity. She points out that in *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir argues in a rather straight-forward manner for women's right to transcendent behaviour without problematizing the consequences of the valorization of will to "progress". Writing in the late 1980's, Irigaray seems - quite rightly! - concerned about the triumph of masculinity manifested in the environmental problems, violence and social inequality in capitalist Western democracies. In *Daughter of Earth* masculinity as expressed in Marie's father's violence is not, however, valorized uncritically. On the other hand, in the circumstances where Marie grows up, it is precisely women's role in biological reproduction and as carers that produce them as such miserable characters. Furthermore, idealization of femininity is exactly what keeps them from seeking independence and keeps them exposed to the violence of their husbands. Irigaray is quite right to point out the consequences of underestimation of feminine values, and we do need to emphasize the need for care and protection. However, as long as the world is characterized by feminization of poverty rather than cultures, and transcendence for a great number of women equals gaining the basic liberal human rights and access to education and money, rejection of motherhood and women's traditional role as carers is a valid emancipatory strategy. It is also the one promoted by both Smedley and de Beauvoir.

5.2.1 Female Role Models: The Mother and the Whore

Smedley not only reproduces a dichotomic gender hierarchy between masculinity and femininity, but she also evokes a dichotomic view on women either as prostitutes or mothers. She, however, views marriage as a form of prostitution,

whereby this dichotomy does not reproduce a clear-cut hierarchy between the two, nor does it valorize motherhood. On the contrary:

In my hatred of marriage, I thought I would rather be a prostitute than a married woman. I could then protect, feed, and respect myself, maintain some right over my own body. Prostitutes did not have children, I contemplated; men did not dare beat them; they did not have to obey. The 'respectability' of married women seemed to rest in their acceptance of servitude and inferiority.²⁹ (*DE*, 123)

The views are based on and symbolized by Marie's mother and her Aunt Helen, who are the two most important women in her childhood. They represent two oppositional types of womanhood: the mother is depicted as sullen, silent, submissive, and bitter. She is a hard-working, suffering figure, whose only means of resistance is her silence, her only means of expression tears. She weeps often and miserably, and her tears embitter Marie's life. Aunt Helen, in contrast, is an outspoken woman, whom Marie admires. She works, earns her own living, first as a hired girl, later in a laundry, finally as a prostitute. Consequently, at home, she can talk to Marie's father as an equal. In young Marie's eyes she becomes an icon of independence and female power: "She feared no one and she openly threatened everyone", (*DE*, 10) and when she joins Marie's family in Trinidad,

[s]he had grown even more beautiful; no rose petal was silkier than her skin. No queen had more confidence than she. And her laugh! When she laughed everyone laughed too, even when they didn't know why. Awkward ugly girls who might easily have hated her for her beauty, stood gossiping with her over the back fence, and when she came darting in at their back doors their eyes were wistful and hungry. She helped them make lotions to soften and bleach their skins, she shampooed their hair with eggs to make it grow and glisten, she cut dress patterns for them, and when they had company on Sunday evenings she did up their hair in puffs and sometimes even loaned them a skirt or a blouse. She could well afford to be generous to others, for she had more than her share of beauty! (*DE*, 28)

Through this idealization Aunt Helen is thus created as a counterpart to Marie's mother, who has respectably sold herself to a single man, her husband. Aunt Helen,

²⁹ These, however, are mere speculations. In reality, Marie rather starves than prostitutes herself. In Carlsbad, where she gets stuck on a sales trip, she gets plenty of offers, but rather lives days without food than accepts the offers. (*DE*, 106)

on the other hand, sells herself to gain money that creates independence. The cost of Helen's choice is respectability, whereas the cost of respectability for Marie's mother is lost agency and equality in relation to her owner, her husband. Yet, as time goes by, Marie grows older – and so does Helen. When Marie visits her as an adult, she realizes Helen's dependency on men, and her looks, which are wearing out. "I stayed with Helen many days, but no man came to see her." (*DE*, 147). A gap has grown between her and Helen: "'I couldn't stand this life, Helen,' I said, 'and I don't see how you can.' 'Beggars can't be choosers'", Helen replies, and wonders whether Marie's education will bring her money – and a rich husband. She cannot see why else Marie would study. The visit depresses Marie, she feels like she is betraying Helen by going away. "It was like leaving my own mother." (*DE*, 149) Still, there is nothing she can do for Helen, who has turned out to be yet another negative role model.

5.3 Gendered Belongings: Hateful Women – Family of Men

Smedley's self-acknowledged scorn for other women is carried into her own narrative, where she repeatedly constructs women as symbols of the hated upper-class. With the following discussion I by no means mean to deny that women as well as men oppress other women. Rather, my point is to draw attention to the fact that the symbolic usage of women figures as representatives of collectivities is a form of cultural reproduction of misogynist images of women, and that there are passages in *Daughter of Earth* where Smedley adopts this practice.

In *Gender and Nation* Nira Yuval-Davis (1997:45) discusses Kubena Mercer's notion of "the burden of representation" in relation to women's role in the cultural reproduction of nation. She points out that whereas men are required to defend the nation, act as soldiers and guardians of the nation, women are constructed as "the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour." Also, through the common conceptualization of a nation as woman/mother (such as speaking of Mother Russia, The Maiden of Finland) the collective territory and collective identity are embodied in the figure of woman. Smedley adopts this usage women as

icons of classes, and often presents the class conflict between women, whereas her belonging to i.e. working-class is depicted and recalled through identification with men.

The first one of such usage of women as symbols of hatred is the “white girl” who becomes an icon of the upper-classes. This girl goes to the same school as Marie, who is first fascinated by her “perfectness”:

In the front seat on the outside row sat a little girl. Her skin was white, her hair was thick and nearly white, and her dresses, shoes and stockings were always white. When the teacher had asked her about her father, she had replied, ‘My father is a doctor!’ and I had stared at her fascinated. (*DE*, 31)

When Marie later during the year becomes the best pupil in the class and gains the seat of honour at the back of the classroom, the narrator makes a point to note that when all the other pupils failed to answer teacher’s question, she would turn to Marie, who would answer “without one falter or mistake... And the little white girl whose father was a doctor had to listen!” (*DE*, 32) In the same passage, Marie is invited to the white girl’s birthday party. (*DE*, 32-5). Despite her mother’s vehement objections, Marie insists on taking three bananas to the party as a present. At the party, the bananas that the family could hardly afford, seem pitifully poor compared to the other children’s gifts of books, silver pieces and handkerchiefs. The bananas symbolize Marie’s further humiliation at the party: she feels completely alienated from the other – rich – children, and recognizes how unwanted she is there. Her dress seems shabby, the manners and the speeches of others only increase her feelings of isolation. She cannot even swallow the marvelous cakes, ice cream and fruit that are offered to the guests. Finally, as the others start playing a game, she is left without a partner, and leaves. Humiliated, she cries on her way home.

In the above passage the white girl represents Marie’s humiliation when faced with the upper-classes. The passage draws attention to the fact that women are separated from each other along the lines of class division, and it is also an occasion where, once more, women become objects of disidentification. Whereas in relation to the

mother, the basis of disidentification was her suppressed role as a mother and wife, in this case the identification is rendered impossible on the basis of class. As is the case in the following passage where the adult Marie takes part on a march opposing the United States' entry into the WW I:

As we marched a tall, big-breasted woman in an elegant, tight-fitting, black riding costume elbowed her way through our lines directly before me. Her face was hard, tense and hateful, and she held her riding whip like a club in her hand. Her hate-filled eyes looked at me as she passed and I knew she wanted to bring her club down over my head. In her I saw a symbol of the ruling class that was forcing us into the war, making our laws, owning our land and industries, forcing us to work for them for the right to live on the earth. (*DE*, 165)

This passage is quite remarkable, for the narrator acknowledges it as a symbol, and it clearly genders the ruling classes as female, despite the fact that the laws were and still are, made by men, like the industries were, and to a great extent still are, owned by men. The land is owned by men, and the work of the working classes were and are supervised by men. The fact that out of the masses of thousands of people, Smedley chooses a woman as a symbol of the upper, owning classes, is a narrative strategy of representational usage of women as scapegoats of male institutions and dominance. On one level, this contributes to the widely spread assumption that men do what they do, i.e. exploit and discriminate other people, out of the pressure from the women of their own classes. On another level, it demonstrates the breath of the gulf between women of different classes.

Throughout my writing of the above analysis, I have been hesitant about my own argument. Have I made much ado about nothing? Have I based my reading on too narrow, presumptuous, defensive a view on the novel's "message"? On one hand, the passages I have analysed above point to the fact that women occupy different subject positions, belong to different classes. This can be seen as a part of the deconstructionist project of the notion of "Woman." On the other hand, in relation to Yuval-Davis' argument, Smedley's narrative does seem to belong to the "burden of representation" assigned for women as embodied bearers, and thus symbols, of collective identities. Furthermore, her willingness to dissociate herself from her

mother manifests itself in the self-acknowledged scorn for other women whereas the positive connotations assigned to her father in the childhood memories are projected onto her positive identifications with men. Albeit the early idealization of the father indeed wears out as Marie grows up.

Furthermore, Smedley seldom, if ever, gives credit for what she has learned to other women. On page 81 she recalls her meeting with a camp schoolteacher, a woman. "At first I was resentful and suspicious of her because she was an educated woman. At last we became friends." It was this woman who urged Marie to become a teacher, and thus crucially affected her life, but she is not even granted a name. There is a tendency in *Daughter of Earth* to associate intellectuality, abstract ideas and Marie's educational development with named men, whereas her feminist ideas seem to stem more from her own reasoning and experience. Her involvement in the Birth Control movement or friendships with other women are not granted emancipatory power, her relations to them seem distant and fragile, and she aligns herself rather with men. It seems that her valorization of masculinity above femininity manifests itself as valorization of male relations over female bondings.

This tendency becomes evident in Marie's search for male role models and her admiration of their freedom. Talking about the men who worked for her father, and who spend their wages on prostitutes and married only virgins, she claims to have been "a friend of all men. I admired and envied them." (*DE*, 68). More importantly, when talking about the Indians, she states: "To me the Indians became a symbol of my duty and responsibility. They took the place of my father, of my brother who was dead and of the brother whose destiny I was as yet uncertain." (*DE*, 191). Here the family is represented in terms of phallocentrism as it effaces the women of the family. Furthermore, the family Marie joins and embraces as her new family is entirely male. And even furthermore, it is the male relationships that she discusses in length and detail as crucial to her development.

Even the earth, which Marie in the beginning of *Daughter of Earth* claims her belonging to, is gendered as male due to its representation through Marie's father. Earth is contrasted with learning, abstraction, books and education: "There was nothing in a book for him; but even a hole in the ground became filled with romance. He kept his eyes, not upon the stars, but upon the earth; he was of the earth and it of him. He dug in the earth, he hugged the earth, he thought in terms of the earth." (*DE*, 68). Indeed, he was of the earth, and she was his daughter.

5.4 United in Misery

Despite her general scorn for women, there are moments in *Daughter of Earth* where Marie sizes up with women in resistance against the dominant patriarchal order, male violence or despotism. The first moment of this resistance is a scene where Marie's parents have once again quarrelled: the father wants to move on, he dreams of fortunes and happiness out there somewhere where he is not; the mother wishes to carry on the poor yet secure life on the farm. Marie's father threatens to leave and take the children with him. He orders Marie and her brother to follow him. Marie, who is still a child, admires her father more than anything, but "there was something about my [weeping] mother that made me disobey the father that night. I ran to my mother and placed my hand on her knee and her tears fell on it." (*DE*, 20).

This moment or gesture symbolizes the recurring theme of duty and responsibility in *Daughter of Earth*. Throughout her life Marie is haunted by images of the poor members of her family. Applied to her feminism, her desire to follow the father represents her will to move on in the male world, and the refusal to leave her mother behind, stands for her sense of duty towards other women.

Another moment where Marie comes to her mother's defense is the scene where the father threatens to beat up Marie's mother, and where the mother seems to be asking Marie to help her. Marie stands next to her, facing her father: "We stood staring into each other's eyes, enemies." Marie despises him for "his cowardice in

attacking someone weaker than himself...for attacking a woman she was his wife and the law gave him right to.” (DE, 72) That day unites Marie and her mother – in misery: “A bond of misery had been welded between us two... a bond of misery that was never broken.” (DE, 73).

Marie’s mother’s tears, however, “embittered [her] life”. (DE, 21) She cannot bear to take up the life that her mother led, but struggles to educate herself. Her aim, however, throughout the story is to voice the experiences of the oppressed: women, the poor, the Indians. She becomes a journalist. From this position Marie expresses not only her own but her mother’s shared hatred towards “rich or powerful people and institutions” (DE, 76), which renders her voice a communal voice of women.

In *Writing Beyond Ending* Rachel DuPlessis discusses the bourgeois upper-class fictions of women artists. She points out that the legitimization for their artistic or professional ambition and assertion of individuality and rejection of traditional domestication of women came from the fact that these women artists claimed to give voice to their mothers and others who toiled in the traditional female role. Their art was thereby conceived as a sort of sacrificial act for the sake of others. (DuPlessis 1985:104). This applies to *Daughter of Earth* as well: Marie’s mother characterized in terms of silence, but she expresses pride over her ‘edjicated’ daughter. (DE, 82). The final reconciliation between the mother and the daughter takes place at Marie’s mother’s deathbed: Marie’s name is her mother’s last word (DE, 87).

This and the rest of the book construct her as a spokeswoman for other women. Her education alienates her from the women among whom she grew up, and thus she cannot share or speak from their position. But from her (current) subject position she makes it her duty and responsibility to voice the experiences of women who are more oppressed than herself. She is thus an advocate for women, who is not speaking from an essentialised position, but about her own and other women’s experiences around her. This is expressed also in her writing of *Cell Mates*, the

stories of the women with whom she spent her time in prison. Smedley describes them as “physical women – as I had once been physical. But now I had some measure of thought, some measure of belief in the power of ideas; in this only did I differ from them.” (*DE*, 218).

Marie’s female bonding is sealed towards the end of the book in a scene where Marie dreams of Death as a gigantic woman with the face of her mother. (*DE*, 265). Again, set next to the figure of the father with stooped shoulders and parted mouth, the mother stands for the death of a woman in marriage. In the dream, Marie takes the smile of Death as a challenge. She bends down in horror to kiss the cheeks of her mother, and finally, closing her eyes, kisses her on the mouth. She wakes up screaming, and goes to her husband telling him that she cannot endure their situation any longer. She lies down trembling, sinks into depression, and finally, decides to leave Anand. Symbolically, the dream, once again, reveals Marie’s resentment of marriage, the wife’s misery and loss of self and agency, and as the kiss of death, it leads to rejection of the couple, marriage, and the heterosexual matrix. However, it can also be read as a symbol of confirmation of sisterhood, as a sign of belonging to and affection for the female sex.

6. THE HISTORICAL AND REPRESENTATIONAL CONTEXT OF *DAUGHTER OF EARTH*

In my analysis so far, I have moved from the text to identity paying little attention to women's position or the representations of women at the time of the novel's publication in general. This is what I intend to do in this chapter. My project is two-fold: first, I want to shortly cast light on the world-wide feminist struggles that took place in the turn of the century and years before it, for no voice – feminist or other – raises out of a void.³⁰ Thus, even if Smedley hardly ever acknowledges her credit to the feminist battles for women's equality during the previous years and decades, it were these struggles that actually enabled her to write (provided her with the discourses to grasp them), and also to publish the book. Second, in order to contextualize Marie's representation and politics, I will compare and contrast Marie with the prevalent representation of women in the 1920's. In the following, I will construct the historical and representational context around *Daughter of Earth* on the basis of Glenda Riley's *Inventing the American Woman* (1986), Sheila Rowbotham's *A Century of Women* (1997), Kumari Jayawardena's *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, and Nancy F. Cott's "The Modern Woman of the 1920's" (1994).

6.1 Feminist Forerunners

As I have stated above, no feminist voice raises out of a void. In the United States, feminists had argued for better education, jobs, legal protection and social security for women, and organized to fight for women's right to vote since the first women's rights meeting at Seneca Falls 1848. The struggles went on for decades, and at the same time, these same struggles took place all over the world: throughout the world women organized to fight for their rights. In Britain, the militant suffragists resorted to hunger strikes and public demonstrations (Rowbotham

³⁰ In "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern society" Homi K. Bhabha criticizes B. Anderson for "naturalizing the momentary 'suddenness' of the arbitrary sign" (1990:309), which I understand as Anderson ignoring the processes which precede the emergence of a marginalized community in the history of a nation. Taking his point, I want to contextualize Smedley's narrative.

1990:11), in the countries such as India, Indonesia, Philippines, Turkey and Finland that were struggling for national independence, women often organized themselves as part of the nationalist movements. On the other hand, industrialization had brought women in the labour force, which in many countries granted them some economic independence. This also meant that in many countries, women's movements aligned themselves – or were formed as part of – socialist labour movements.

In the United States, the vote for women was won in 1919. After this, the women's movement had difficulties in finding a common cause, and as Riley (1986: 197) points out, in the 1920's there was much more interest in individual expressions of the achievements of feminism than in women as a group. Women's interests were diverted to trade unions and consumers leagues, international peace movement. They campaigned in anti-lynching movement, the National Women's Party concentrated on advancing the Equal Rights Amendment requiring removal of protective labour legislation for women facing opposition from the left. There was little co-operation between the blacks and the whites.

Without the years of struggles of the women's movement Smedley could hardly have gained public recognition for her book. The fact that Smedley, however, hardly recognizes her debt to these struggles are probably many, but one of the explanations for her reluctance to do so may be class: most of the advocates of women's rights were educated middle-class women, and as I have pointed out on several occasions, Smedley felt quite alienated from them. Another explanation might be the "tight-robe dance of feminism": when acknowledging and referring to other women's texts and actions women risk their own texts to become discredited. Or, perhaps it just was not part of her agenda: there were more burning issues at stake for her, and, all and all, Smedley's attitude conforms to the characteristics of "The New Modern Woman" of the 1920's, which I will now turn to portray.

6.2 The New Woman of the 1920's

In "The Modern Woman of the 1920's, American Style" Cott portrays changes in the lives and representation of women in the 1920's in the US drawing special attention to the emergence of mass production and increased consumption. The turn of the century had produced effective feminist as well as socialist and labour movements out of which the new image of a modern woman emerged. She was produced with the aid of the new technical inventions such as radio and cinema, and more attached to goods and consumerism than to the flag, even though her production was part of the larger movement towards cultural uniformity. The "need" for this uniformity had its roots in the cultural and political diversity of the US created by massive immigration between 1880 and 1920, especially from Southern and Eastern Europe, the political conflicts, workers' strikes the rise of socialism and the resulting Red Scare in the 1910's, and the controversy that surrounded US involvement in the WWI. By the 1920's the suffrage for women had been won, they had entered work-life on a unforeseen scale, and the US had "won" the war with the Allies. After the war the troops demobilized, things were to get back to normal, and the redomestication of women as well as the the establishment of "American way of life" as a new form of cultural unity took place with the new forms of communication such as radio and cinema, aided with newspapers and magazines, forging common information and values.

If the 1910's were characterized by social movements and progress, the 1920's stood for exposure in the purchase and production of new technical products, advertising and unevenly distributed economic growth. In the Progressive Era (liberal terminology) of the 1910's women had asserted themselves as willing, able and rightful participants of the world; in the New Era (Republican terminology) their willingness, ableness and rightfulness were shown to find their best and noblest expression in consumerism. The modern American woman had now been liberated - to purchase.

In the 1920's the size of the households and families shrunk. Marital fertility dropped, and borders and lodgers as well as live-in servants became increasingly rare. (Between 1800 and 1900 the average number of children of a white woman dropped from 7 to 3.5.) Although birth control devices were only removed from the federal anti-obscenity law in 1936, limiting marital fertility gained wider acceptance in the 20's whereas in the 1910's members of Margaret Sanger's birth control movement had been imprisoned for the illegal action of providing information on contraception to women.

Sexual behaviour and ideology had changed along the declining birthrate, and female sexuality, premarital sex and sexual pleasure became less rebellious, and popular, intellectual and social-scientific writers criticized the "Victorian" sexual morality. Movies, advertisers and pulp magazines willingly took advantage of the liberation of female sexuality. Riley (1986) and Rowbotham (1997) describe a media image of a 1920's woman as a flapper. The "flapper" represented a new image of an independent woman who "smoked, wore short skirts, performed obscene dances, favoured one-piece swimming suits, listened to jazz, entered psychoanalysis, practiced birth control, and leaned towards Bolshevism." (Riley 1986:203). Sexual expression was, however, domesticated in a new model of companionate marriage. Professional marital advice-givers in the 1920's and 1930's saw Victorian marriage as hierarchical and emotionally barren, and the female sexuality was tamed, and claimed to find its full satisfaction in a heterosexual marriage. Homosexuality replaced female sexuality as a radical form of "abnormality", marriage became increasingly popular and the marrying age declined. The marrying trend was especially apparent among college graduates. By 1930 20 percent of the eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old Americans attended college (the proportion more than quadrupled since 1890), and more female college graduates married and at younger age than their 19th century peers. (10 percent of the generation born between 1865 and 1885 never married, but among the men and women born between 1895 and 1915 the proportion was only 6 percent.)

“The modern woman” also attended schools and got herself a job more frequently than ever before. By 1930 50 to 60 percent of teenagers attended high school, and in the 1920’s women composed almost half of the students in colleges and universities. However, not all them opened their doors for women. Women were now especially employed in the white-collar sector in clerical, managerial and sales jobs. This “flow” of women into work should, however, not be exaggerated, for according to the U.S. census, in 1930 less than 12 percent of the married women worked for pay outside the home. This was, however, enough to raise a debate on the possibility of women to combine home and career, and it was claimed that women were trying to keep the cake and to eat it.

Social sciences gained increasing authority during the 1920’s, and claimed both to be able to explain the modern woman’s problems and to solve them. Psychology, especially behaviorist psychology with undertones of psychoanalytical interests in the unconscious sexual drives, was now used to explain and to officially establish the categories of femininity and masculinity. The model of well-being by Lewis Termin and his associates, was based on quantifiable data and matching biological sex to psychological correlates along very conventional assumptions of gender roles. The individuals’ suffering was seen to stem from their inability to adjust themselves to social norms accorded by their gender. Thereby – hardly surprisingly! – the ability of a man to provide living for his (sic!) family was seen as an important component of “masculinity”, with the result that women’s economic independence was regarded a threat to the well-being of men. Social scientists thus contributed with the full power of their new authority to the reconstruction of the old social order based on women’s servitude to men, which of course, was the proof of women’s “adjustment” to the role accorded to them by nature! The fact that more women professionals worked in the field of social science than in for example medicine did not enable feminist voices to be heard in the discussion.

Housekeeping changed as well. The new technological devices that were designed to save the housewives' time turned out rather to raise the standard of household care rather than to shorten the hours of labour. Whatever time was saved was dedicated to the improvement of the families health and security and child-rearing. New advice for childcare emanated from public health and social work agencies, schools, women's clubs, magazines, newspapers and pulpits. No that childbearing had become somewhat voluntary – at least for middle class women – new energies were destined to flow into the creation of a suitable environment for the children's healthy and “normal” adjustment.

Advertising linked the new housekeeping and childbearing of the modern homemaker to new consumerism. She could attain her modernity by purchasing new commodities and appliances through which she could meet the requirements of social norms of efficiency and adjustment. Pictorial representations and “name brands” were the new advertising techniques, and the advertisers increasingly exploited psychological revelations of the irrational motives of behaviour. They made full use of symbolism and aimed at setting the emotions of the consumer to serve the sales. The consumer was also portrayed as a “she” as statistics showed that 80 percent of purchasing was made by women. Individuality, modernity and sex appeal were the attributes that characterized the modern woman who relied on scientifically tested methods and commodities in her care for the children and the husband – as well as herself: by 1929 cosmetic industry was spending almost the same amount of money in advertising as the seventeen times bigger food industry.

The modern woman was thus redomesticated, the traditional household status and heterosexual service secured, by making home her primary occupation. She gained her agency and status through purchase. The more she consumed, the more efficiently she asserted her sexual freedom and individuality, wielded power and her newly gained civil rights. Advertising collapsed feminist emphasis on women's range and choice into individual consumerism, the feminist assertion of sexual freedom was domesticated by social-psychologists to marriage, and the feminist

defiance of the gendered division of labour got buried. The backlash of the first wave of feminism came in the form of the new American woman who seemed to practice what the feminists had preached, but asserted her new rights and freedom in heterosexual marriage and purchase. The American advertising industry successfully turned the decades of feminist and socialist struggles, which had won women the vote, paid work and improved their social status, into an inevitable product of technological improvement and economic expansion. The idea of the modern woman was based on prediction of continual economic expansion, and the Great Depression that brought the 1920's to an end again evoked a reactionary call for women to return home.

6.3 Marie and The New Woman

The characteristics of the new modern woman render some of the ideas represented in *Daughter of Earth* far less radical than I first thought, and quite a few of Marie's characteristics match Cott's description of the modern woman. First of all, Marie's assertion of her sexual rights was indeed somewhat common among collage graduates in the 1920's. Her demand of equality in heterosexual relationship results in a companionate marriage at a young age, which very neatly exemplifies Cott's depiction of the marrying trend in the 1920's. Her divorce is also far from rare as by 1929, around 17 percent of marriages ended in divorce.

It must be, however, born in mind that the events depicted in book, the years of her first marriage and studies took place in the 1910's when the ideas of companionate marriage, women's sexual freedom and economic independence were being formed. By the time the book was published, in 1929, those *ideas* had already gained wider acceptance, and thus appeared less radical. It should also be remembered that college graduates hardly represent the whole of the population. Also, representations, especially those in advertising, never really match the realities of actual people. Those are diverse, and determined by those people's cultural backgrounds, values, beliefs, economic and class status, colour etc. Thus, despite the general acceptance of the idea and representation of the modern woman

there must have been a great deal of people – and still are! – for whom they were completely alien, and threatening – even as ideas, not to mention practice. Also, whenever we deal with history, we deal with representations.³¹

The new emphasis on beauty, sexuality and consumerism may have enabled *Daughter of Earth*'s popularity, but Marie's character is far from a flapper – she, for example, rejects the request for keeping up her looks with cosmetics, and despises consumerism. Her problematic and complex attitude towards sexuality never drives her to perform obscene dances or to display her body. Rather, she struggles not to avoid attention drawn to her body, and neglects her looks. She emphasizes the intellect, and the requirement of women's right to sexual liberty is argued for in terms of equality. Also, Smedley discusses sexuality strictly on a heterosexual basis. As the taboo of homosexuality, which in the 1920's replaced women's sexual drive as psychological abnormality, is not touched upon in *Daughter of Earth* Marie's sexual liberation by no means threatens the heterosexual matrix. Moreover, Marie values her relationships with men far more than friendships with women thus prioritizing heterosexual relations. Also, Marie's relations to women mostly remain within the private sphere, they gain their significance through familial ties or take the form of personal friendship, whereas the public dealings engage men. This, too, conforms with the heterosexual gender system.

The fact that Marie works is at no point an issue. Throughout it is noted that men earn more, they have better working conditions and usually hold better jobs. The employers expect sexual favours and harass the female workers, but the fact that Marie holds jobs or her entry into schools never is a gendered issue. It is class and poverty that threaten to deprive her of proper education, not sex. Her sex raises protective attitudes in some of her employers, harassing tendencies in others, and

³¹ Marie's life-line echoes new tendencies but do not represent the majority: according to Riley (1986): 23 percent of American women held jobs in 1920, 24 percent in 1930.

sometimes hinders the development of her career, but never prevents her from working.

Marie's emphasis on her Americanness, which she becomes aware of in relation to the Indians engages *Daughter of Earth* in the construction project of takes part in the construction of Americanness – even if she opposes, or grows to oppose, the mainstream definition of it as was evident in the interrogations. Marie's notion of Americanness is based on individuality, the corner stone of the American dream. "Success, written on the heart of America was also written on mine." (DE, 172) Marie's sense of duty towards her family, however, distances her from the notion of individuality adopted even by the upper-class socialists: Marie struggles to send money to her brother Dan so that he could learn some trade and become a skilled labourer, but her decision faces opposition from the socialists who believe in attaining change on a general social level. This opposition is, again, represented by an Irish girl student (another woman):

"My life was my own life, she said; I had not brought my brothers or sister into existence, nor was I ever responsible for them. If I really had social conscience, I would go and study and prepare myself for better work. It was useless to waste one moment of time or one cent of money on an individual. Carried to its logical conclusion, that was not only charity, but it was like spending a lifetime giving beggars a nickel. Only a new society could wipe out poverty, and I should give myself only to such a movement". (DE, 167).

Marie's counter-argument expresses her sense of responsibility toward real existing people: she had deserted her little brothers before, and now one of them needed her, for Marie consciousness equals responsibility, and her consciousness of her brother's difficulties renders her responsible for him. One cannot just ignore presently existing pain and change structures when, in the meanwhile, people die out of poverty!

Marie's individuality and her depiction of herself as distinguished and separate from other women, recreates heterosexual matrix, and matches well with Cott's description of the representation of the modern woman relying on individuality.

She unites with other women, her mother especially in misery, but there are only short references to her work in the women's movement. It is mentioned that a woman came to her and asked her to work for the birth control movement. This woman was Margaret Sanger, who came to Smedley's help when she was imprisoned, but in *Daughter of Earth* her name is not mentioned. Nor does Marie's work in the movement seem to signify much. Her heart is elsewhere, with the Indians (a male movement!), and it is stated that freedom of choice was an important factor in Marie's decision to concentrate on the Indian movement: "The Indian movement was the first thing I had suffered for out of principle, out of choice. It was not just living, *not just reacting to life – it was expression*. It gave me sense of self-respect, of dignity, that nothing else had ever given me". (*DE*, 226).

For Marie, sex signifies a given, and to fight in a women's movement as a woman and for women, would be reactionary and simply emphasize the fact that she belongs to the inferior sex by nature. This belonging is determined by "nature", allowing no choice from her part. She despises "femininity" that implies submission, weeping and misery. Freedom to choose drives her to assert her independence in masculine terms, even if there is throughout the book a petrifying awareness that as a woman, she is imposed to a double standard that limits her freedom. Womanhood implies inferiority, as a woman she is a captive of her sex, but her work in the Indian movement helps her to rise above her gender – at least momentarily.

Marie is thus detached from feminist movements of the 1910's, which seems to have been typical of the modern women of the 1920's. She did not care much about the vote, for it had brought no relief for her mother, nor did it liberate her mother from the despotism of her husband who, by threatening to leave the family, forces Marie's mother to reveal to him how she had voted. (*DE*, 59-60). The mother, whom the vote had given a moment of dignity and "straightened up her figure", is obliged to reveal her secret while she lies sick in bed. From then on, "when the right of women to vote was ever mentioned in the presence of my mother after that

her eyes sought a crack in the floor and followed it back and forth in silence. And her silence was heavy with bitterness." (*DE*, 60)

Marie's disbelief in the vote, however, also reflects the modern women's general tendency to ignore the decades of struggles³² that had preceded the victory of women's suffrage. Marie's freedom seems detached from women's movements, which after the suffrage found themselves struggling to find common policies to fight for, and were separated along socialist and liberal ideologies, and colour. Marie's individualism is also asserted in relation to the socialists of whom she remains critical, expressing both her scorn for the upper-class idealist socialists, and her disinterest in Marxist theory taught in the socialist study groups and gatherings (*DE*, 162).

Marie's rejection of family and motherhood, however, distinguish her politics from the ideal of the modern woman of the 1920's. Marie does not wish to have it both ways to obtain a career and a family, she chooses career. Also, her rejection of fancy clothing and scorn for material convenience draw a line between her and the ideal consumer, and her "masculine" behaviour debases the socio-psychological arguments of biologically determined gender roles. On the other hand, her inability to combine a career and marriage can be seen as an example of their incompatibility, and could thus serve as an example that reinforces prevailing gender roles, the division of labour, and would thus work in favour of the re-domestication of women. Furthermore, her nervous breakdown would be the exact prove for the behaviourist's claim for gender adjustment: in the framework of adjustment theory Marie's breakdown would result directly from her inability to adjust to true womanhood (this is how Usandizaga seemed to read it!), which of course should result from an inner conflict rooted in unconscious sexual drive.

³² The inception of the women's rights movement in the US dates back to 1848 and the convention of the Seneca Falls. In Flaxner, Eleanor 1959. *Century of Struggle. The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*. New York: Ballantine Books.

This interpretation is in striking contradiction to the feminist reading of nervous illness, which sees the inner conflict rooted in the prevalent power relations between sexes. Thereby it would be the social restrictions set upon women, the narrow, conventional understanding of femininity that restricts women's self expression, and the resulting suppression of their feelings, and the denial of social, psychological and physical agency function as the catalyst of mental illness. The former interpretation takes gender as natural consequence of biological sex leading to superimposed and suppressive gender roles, the latter, on the other hand, takes traditional gender roles as social and cultural as consequence of the power relations between genders and sees them as means of legitimizing the *unnatural* oppression of women. This latter view thus reverses the logic of the mainstream socio-psychologists' understanding of mental illness.³³

Daughter of Earth thus seems to allow several interpretations: Marie's liberty can serve as a "bad example" of a failed liberation of a woman who sacrifices marital bliss in favour of an ideology and political work (however questionable it is that she would ever have been happy in a marriage!) or, it can be seen as a path-breaking early feminist work attempting at something (intellectual and sexual at freedom of women) that still has to be won. Apparently, the feminist researchers who rediscovered the work in the 1980's chose the latter example, as did the MacChartyist censors.

³³ This feminist argument is brilliantly expressed Charlotte Perkins Gilman's master-piece, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) a short story on depression following a childbirth. In *The Yellow Wallpaper* the narrator suffering from debilitation is denied any right to decide on her own actions, her wishes are ignored and all attempts to take decisions are overruled by her physician husband. *The Yellow Wallpaper* is an allegory of the lives of 19th century bourgeois wives and their total deprivation of social agency. The protagonist ends up obsessed by the yellow wallpaper in her bedroom, she begins to see female figures in the paper, and tearing the paper down liberates them. Insane? Yes, she is. And why? Because there is no way anyone would take either her or her illness seriously, but due to her "illness" she is to stay in bed, denied any action that would allow her to recover. Her illness is her weakness and her weakness keeps her ill. Her revolt is an act of insanity, and it is hardly surprising that a great deal of feminists have been regarded as mentally ill, transforming their penis envy into social revolt, which has made them (us) an easy target for ridicule. Also, Susan Bordo discusses the relationship between discourse on gender and e.g. hysteria in "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault."

7. THE GENDER POLITICS OF *DAUGHTER OF EARTH*: MISOGYNY CHALLENGED, DISPLAYED, REPRODUCED

Throughout my analysis, and the whole of my study, I have maintained that literature is a place where language and narrative meet ideology, and all the narrative choices made by the author are, in fact, political. For language creates reality, is in itself a reality, and thereby, as Maaïke Meijer (1993) argues, texts themselves can be violent. It is for this reason that I want to intervene in Smedley's narration, and point out occasions where her own authorial voice becomes misogynist. On the other hand, I will discuss scenes in *Daughter of Earth* where Smedley depicts and thereby brings forth and into textual existence gendered violations against women. In order to do this, I will rely on Elizabeth Grosz's (1990) definitions of sexism, patriarchy and phallogentrism as social forms of misogyny.

As much as *Daughter of Earth* is about construction of an identity/identities for the author, it is about voicing violence and violations against women. Domestic violence is a central theme in the book. In *Daughter of Earth* this violence takes place mostly among the economically oppressed miners' communities, where the men beating their wives seem to originate from their frustration about failing to perform the expectation of a man to provide for his family, and the violence of women against their children seem to stem from their oppressed state as wives of poor women. One of Smedley's aims as a writer is to voice these realities.

Violence against women, however, is not limited to the domestic sphere. In *Daughter of Earth* women are also suppressed, and thus violated against, economically, in the labour market, and Smedley makes a point of frequently stating how much money she earns from her jobs – which is often far less than the men working in the same places earn.

As I have pointed out on several occasions, *Daughter of Earth* clearly a feminist text, for it poignantly depicts inequality between women and men in economic, socio-political and personal relationships. It draws special attention to restrictions upon women's sexuality, and the resulting socio-psychological damage and economic dependency that hinder women from taking responsibility for themselves. At the same time, however, as Smedley takes pains to point out the inequality between the sexes, she reproduces a clear gender hierarchy where masculine values – and characters – are associated with the positive and feminine connotes the negative. This of course reflects the lived realities of Smedley's life, which renders all the more alarming the fact that due to women's socio-economic discrimination and oppression, they are produced as such miserable creatures they can only unite in misery with their relations marked by competition and scorn. In *Daughter of Earth*, there is a clear tendency to emphasize and prioritize relations to men, even though Smedley's biography shows that she had a vast circle of female friends with whom she co-operated personally, professionally and politically.

In *Feminist Knowledge* Elizabeth Grosz's defines sexism, patriarchy and phallogentrism as social forms of misogyny. Grosz examines these three forms of women's oppression in relation to Western philosophy, but misogyny manifests itself in all types of representations and narratives, Grosz's terminology can easily be adapted to literary analysis of any kind. I will here discuss them to the narrative strategies adopted by Smedley.

Sexism is an empirical phenomenon that is manifested in acts of discrimination against women. The sexist acts range from "pejorative comments and assumptions about women to their active exclusion from certain social spheres, to conscious intimidation, harassment, and overt violence, including rape". (149) Grosz points out that sexism is *in principle* reversible but that women *as women*, or as a group, do not oppress men *as men*. Men's sexist behaviour is legitimated by a number of social institutions, laws, rituals, cultural assumptions and customs that underlie patriarchal culture.

Patriarchy is the structure that systematically evaluates masculine as the positive and feminine as the negative. It is a “regulated system which positions men and women in superior and inferior social positions and grant different meanings and values to them”. (151). Thereby, for example a woman having affairs becomes a ‘slut’ whereas identical behaviour of a man is quite acceptable, or at least in accordance with his “nature”. Patriarchal structures vary socio-historically and geographically, but they are always committed to maintaining male supremacy.

Phallocentrism is a discursive, textual and representational strategy, which effaces the autonomous representation of femininity. Within a phallogentric discourse women are either incorporated in the concept of human even when this ‘human’ is represented as inherently masculine/male, or she is presented in terms of lack in relation to the man who are constructed as the norm. (Freudian psychoanalysis, which takes the phallos as its point of departure in defining men and women’s sexualities, exemplifies this latter strategy.) It is through phallogentric discourse that femininity and thereby women are produced as the Other. Phallogentricism in representation works both through levelling, i.e effacement of differences between subjects, and through hierarchization whereby woman is regarded as a lesser or, as in Freudian psychoanalysis, castrated man.

All the three forms of misogyny are of course inter-connected, function to support each other, and they are all manifest in *Daughter of Earth*. The context, early 20th century Unites States is clearly a patriarchal society where the relationships between men and women are structured in terms of gender hierarchy that positions men as women’s superiors. Already as a child Marie learns that male animals are more valuable than female animals (*DE*, 7), and that women’s sexuality is traded between men. Fathers guard their daughters’ virginity in the mine camps, respectable women trade their sexuality in marriage and disrespectable as prostitutes. Patriarchy manifests itself in the unequal relationship between Marie’s parents, her father’s high-handed decisions to move, and make his family move,

around the country in the pursuit of wealth and her mother's submissive silence. This same hierarchy is repeated over and over again in the depictions of other marriages. Patriarchal power is represented by Marie's father, but the repetition of similar gender-hierarchy renders personal relations general, and the openly manifested sexism of Marie's interrogators as well as Marie's throwing out of the Indian independence movement universalizes the phenomenon. Inequality between men and women manifests itself also in the different working conditions provided for men and women in a cigar shop: Marie and other girls work silently in a dark and dusty backroom whereas the union men another clean and light room are allowed to talk and leave earlier (*DE*, 55).

Sexism is frequently depicted in *Daughter of Earth*. Sexual harassment is rather a rule than an exception that Marie has to deal with when working as a stenographer and sales woman. The ultimate violation of the female body, the rape, is also depicted in the book and will be discussed below.

Phallocentrism of course has its basis in real conditions of women: when one's sex is the basis of oppression, it hardly encourages one to celebrate and to base one's identity on sex, but rather highlights one's own difference and not-belonging to that group – if one wants to 'succeed in this world'. Phallocentrism is both challenged and reproduced in *Daughter of Earth*, of which both of the following analyses – of the name and the Rape – will serve as examples. With all their ambiguities and occasional contradictions they also exemplify the unresolved nature of Marie's identity, and thus function as a un-conclusionary conclusion to my thesis.

7.1 The Name of My Own

They asked me my name. Marie Rogers, I replied... Husband's name Knut Larsen.

'Oh, your name is Larsen then!' they exclaimed.

'My name is Marie Rogers!'

'You're married, you say?'

'Yes, but Rogers is the name I was born with and it is the name I will die with.'

‘Sorry, Mrs Larsen, but your name is Larsen.’
This poisoned my three years of study. (*DE*, 136)

The practice whereby women assume their husband’s name when they marry is a form of phallocentrism. Since the early days of U.S. feminism the issue has been a matter of concern for women, for the practice is one way of labelling women as male property. Thus, also, Lucy Stone, a women’s rights activist and abolitionist, kept her own name when marrying Henry Blackwell in 1855 (Riley 1986:115). Their contract read: ”While acknowledging our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relationship of husband and wife... we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no sanction of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to such of the present laws of marriage, as [they] refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority, investing him with legal powers which no honourable man would exercise, and which no man should possess”. This announcement symbolized by Stone’s keeping her name led to public ridicule of Blackwell, which only demonstrates how forcefully the definition of masculinity relies on superiority and ownership of men.

It is because of this symbolic power that language possesses that the name and the title have gained so much attention from feminists. (And because it is such a common and widespread practice in the West, it has gained wide attention in the media.) The “Ms. battle” aims at women to be considered as individuals with full human rights. The issue of defining women by their marital status as wives (Mrs.) or available for marriage (Miss) has gained important symbolic value. Today, it is stated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women³⁴ that women and men as wives and husbands enjoy the same personal rights, including the right to choose a family name over women. Furthermore, the issue of the name embodies the feminist claim that personal is political and, again, calls the public/private dichotomy into question.

³⁴ A United Nations Convention that became an international treaty in 1981 – importantly still not signed by the United States. Article 16.1(g).

Marie identifies strongly with her name. The name, Marie Rogers, is not something she has, but what she is. It defines her as a subject, an individual, and in a sense, in Saussurian terms, *Daughter of Earth* can be seen as a construction of a signified for that very signifier, Marie Rogers. The name is an anchor, semantic embodiment of her confusing experiences, which she wants to understand and make sense of.

One of her childhood memories retains her father singing a song called 'Sweet Marie' in one of the festive social gatherings, molasses pulling, in the rural farming community. "Sweet Marie" is a song of secret love for a girl "pure and sweet" who makes the singer "falter at thy feet". The adult Marie, the narrator remembers this occasion well – "for was my name not Marie", and she recalls feeling embarrassed about the song (*DE*, 18-9), probably because her strong identification with the name renders the song incestuous.

The two constituents of the name, the private forename and the public surname, construct and dichotomize Marie's identity. Through the lyrics of the song her first name, the private and intimate part of it, is associated with the body and emotions. They represent femininity (it is the first name that genders/sexes us), belong to the private realm and importantly, evoke the feeling of embarrassment in Marie. Her, and her father's, surname, on the other hand, is associated with attributes connoting transcendence (the want of change) and the imaginary (stories and songs – even if not true). The last name is also the one used in public affairs, traditionally reserved for men.

Marie feels strongly about having to change her name when she marries:

There were times when I hated Knut. Why I didn't know. People called me 'Mrs Larsen', just if I, Marie Rogers, had sunk into the earth, or at best had become an appendage of Knut. The word was like taunt to me. Everything about me intensified this. There was the young married couple next door in our apartment house. She stopped work when she married, and sat at home all day long waiting for her husband to return. They lived a purely sex existence. In two or three months eruptions began to show upon her mouth

and on her face – the entire house knew what the disease was. She was heavy with a child, but syphilis within a marriage is respectable. (*DE*, 131)

This passage clearly links Marie's loss of her maiden (sic!) name to the role of women within a marriage. Having to take Knut's name threatens her individuality, and the passage demonstrates that her personal feelings have their origin in social reality. The young couple next door is not just a couple next door, but as similar couples reoccur in the book, they come to represent a social norm. Marie herself has not stopped working, nor does she follow her husband into the desert where he works. Instead, she continues her to work and study, but feels restricted by the gender expectations set upon her due to her sex. These are expressed even by her otherwise liberal-minded sister-in-law, who disavows Marie's independence as a wife: "I was not only an idiot, it seemed, but was doing her brother an injury by being married to him and not living as his wife.[...] Love, she insisted, meant following man even to a desert". (*DE*, 130).

To Marie, this kind of wifery represented by the couple next door "was an enemy of woman" (*DE*, 130), and the wife stands for what Marie ought to be – a role which would render her a solely sexual being with no other dimensions to her character, and thus subordinate her to her husband. This subordination is symbolized by the simple fact that the husband's last name replaces that of the woman; he invades her name, conquers the public sphere, and assumes the representation of his wife.

But it is not only the division of the couple's life into public realm represented by the husband and private sphere being reserved for the woman that evokes Marie's resentment. The passage also points out the fact that marriage institutionalizes a sexual pact whereby a woman sells her body for a man for protection and economic security, rendering respectable even venereal diseases which suggests extra-marital affairs. To Marie this is a question of ownership implying slavery of the woman, and as if to confirm her anxiety about marital power-relations, the man next door soon takes to beating his wife. Just like Marie predicted.

Smedley's view on marriage resembles Charlotte Perkins Gilman's theorization of gender roles outlined in "Women and Economics" which is one of the few theoretical feminist texts at the turn of the century United States, and was first published in 1898.³⁵ Marie, however, proves more radical than Gilman. As Sondra R. Herman points out in "Loving Courtship or the marriage Market. The Ideal and Its Critics, 1871-1911"³⁶ Gilman did not disavow the idea of marriage, but saw women's economical equality in a marriage as a possibility for an equal companionship of the wife and the husband. *Daughter of Earth*, on the other hand, insists on the issue being more complicated, and the traumatizing effects of marriage and gender roles in society on a woman lying deeper. The social hypocrisy, silence surrounding especially women's sexuality, and legislative restrictions (for example, in the early 20th century US it was illegal even to give out information about contraception (Sanger 1937)) not only prevented women from taking charge of their own bodies, but also caused psychological damage.

When Marie's first marriage ends in a divorce, she feels free: "I was a free person again, my name was Marie Rogers, the world was my home and the wind my companion". (*DE*, 143). Through the divorce Marie thus gains back her own name, and she no longer has to feel like an appendage of her husband. She is thus able to assert her identity in terms of American individuality. Through her encounter with the Indian independence movement, however, her individuality is challenged again.

With the Indians Marie learns that "the emancipation of a people can come only by the great masses organizing and fighting for it". (*DE*, 184-5). This same idea of emancipating the masses underlies the other important movement for Marie, socialism. Both of the movements, however, are male dominated, and require Marie's suppression of her sexual politics (*DE*, 238). The socialist and the nationalist ideology sought to raise the consciousness of the masses on the

³⁵ *The Feminist Papers from Adams to de Beauvoir*, 1974. Rossi, Alice R. (ed.)

³⁶ *In Our American Sisters*.

mechanisms of capitalist and imperialist oppression respectively. Both of these movements welcomed women, but remained blind to their own oppressive mechanisms. (On women's involvement in Indian nationalist movement see Jayawardena (1986:73-108); on nationalism and feminism Yuval-Davis (1997); feminism and socialism e.g. Jaggar (1988)). Thus, in order to gain political power as a movement, they require an erasure of individual characteristics, and insist on a group of people acting as a single body. By failing to question the patriarchal power relations underlying - and reproduced by - the movement, they operate in terms of phallogentrism e.g. by demanding women to ignore their gender.

In *Daughter of Earth* this political requirement of the rejection of individualism is spelled out by Anand, Marie's second husband, who demands Marie to take off her name from the articles she writes for a Socialist paper, *The Call* (DE, 253). At first, the editor of *The Call* refuses to erase her name from the articles. However, due to Anand's growing contempt for this "cheap and American" egoistic convention, Marie insists, and the editor finally agrees claiming that the reason for it actually lies in the poor quality of her writing. Marie, herself, is unhappy about the decision: "I... hated to have my name taken off my articles – not because of ego. To do this thing because of personal pressure instead of conviction humiliated me". (DE, 253).

The irony of the situation lies in the fact that this political movement that required her to erase any traces of personality from her public work, expels her for very personal reasons. When Juan Diaz spreads round the rumor that he has slept with Marie, this is used as a political weapon against Anand. Thus the same movement that, by requiring Marie to erase her name in a sense states that personal does not matter, by expelling her contradicts itself: personal does matter when it means not conforming to the rules of the community.

I brought up the issue of name first of all, because it seems to symbolize Smedley's individualist feminism. It also embodies the requirement of women to have a full

right to decide on both their private and public lives and representations, which inseparably affect our lives. Also, the issue of name appears in relation to both of Marie's marriages, and thus brings two different yet equally patriarchal cultures in a dialogue. In regard to Marie's first marriage, it is other people, not Knut, who insist on calling Marie by her husband's name. The issue is thus a matter of convention, whereas in relation to the Indian movement it becomes political. Also, as Knut never requires Marie to erase her name, he remains a rather liberal figure, whereas Anand's insistence renders him a more oppressive character. This alarmingly easily raises Westro-centric connotations of women being more liberated in the West which is a common ethnocentric assumption of Western feminists (pointed out by e.g. Mohanty (1991)). This, however, by no means cancels the fact that in both cases Marie is denied the right to her own name due to patriarchal practice and phallogocentrism.

In *Daughter of Earth* the issue of the name is left at Marie's leaving the whole Indian movement, but according to the MacKinnons' biography (1989:53) for the rest of her life, Smedley not only signed her articles, but rejected "objectivity" and "neutrality" in her public work as a journalist. According to them, she was "unabashedly opinionated and autobiographical in everything she wrote". In regards to my argument above, Smedley thus insisted that a writer should define her or his subject position, and her life and work foreran the second-wave feminist slogan of personal being political. The impossibility to separate these two is embodied in Marie's insistence to keep both parts of her own name. Only when a person is allowed both to take charge of her own body and to voice her opinions, has she fully acquired her human rights.

7.2 Against My Will? – The Politics of Rape

For me, the most disturbing scene in *Daughter of Earth* is the one where Marie is raped by Juan Diaz, a member of the Indian independence movement (*DE*, 192-8). It is also the most difficult to interpret, for Smedley's own interpretation seems contradictory and ambiguous. The passage reveals itself as a confused mixture of

sexual politics, emphasis on the unconscious, social restrictions on women's sexuality, her double interpretation with the narrator intervening with a new point of view. Since the very first time I read the scene I have read it as a rape. Smedley, however, never uses the word, but rather renders Marie guilty of the rape accusing her(self) of having internalized the social norms restricting women's sexuality, and thus failing to face her responsibility for the situation. I am still puzzled by the scene, which seems to offer no final solution for interpretation. I have pondered upon narrative strategies, wondered whether this form of depiction was the only way to discuss the issue of rape in popular fiction in her times. How should I interpret the scene? How is it related to agency, the ability to act, enabled by the discovery of oneself as a speaking subject? What are the politics of the rape scene? I will return to these questions, but let us first see what happens in the scene.

One night when Marie returns home, Juan Diaz is waiting for her. The landlady has let him in. Marie is taken by surprise, for Juan Diaz is not a close friend. Juan Diaz explains his late visit by saying that he is leaving the city, and inquires about Talvar Singh, another member of the movement, who has shortly before escaped from the British Espionage. He has left Marie in charge of a black notebook which contains the names and addresses of Indian revolutionaries. Marie has promised not to tell anyone that Talvar Singh has been to her place, so she denies having seen him. With her mind still on Talvar, Marie wonders what reason might have brought Juan Diaz to her place, and invites him for a cup of tea. Something about Juan Diaz puzzles and disturbs Marie, as if some memory related to Juan Diaz's belt buckle and Sardarji's expression when wishing farewell to him when leaving the city is haunting her. She feels weakened by something, and jeers at the man, who makes a pass at her. He puts his hands firmly on Marie's shoulders, asking whether she is sure she is not interested, pulls her closer with a sudden movement and again inquires about Talvar Singh. Marie jerks. "Let me go!" Instead, Juan Diaz, still holding her in a vice-like grip, insists on the truth. Marie jerks in "blind fear, for I liked him and yearning in my blood, long suppressed in shame, had begun to struggle with my mind." (*DE*, 194) Physically, Marie struggles to release herself

from Juan Diaz's grip asking him to "please... let me go..." A chair falls over, Marie struggles, her voice chokes, her mind can no longer think. "Don't!" The room starts blurring and whirring in Marie's eyes. "Terror... the shadow of dark, outspread wings of a bird, swooping... he was carrying me in his arms... his lips were hot as fire... and his body had hurled itself upon me."

Afterwards, Marie cries, but in Juan Diaz's voice there is triumph, a hint of a smile, when he asks mockingly whether Marie does not want him to go. His touch, however, is gentle. Juan Diaz explains the whole thing to have happened only because Marie had jeered at him, and accuses her of having lied about Talvar Singh. After a long silence ("ten minutes ticked themselves off"), he asks Marie to forgive him – and not to tell anyone for it would ruin his work. "Why should I not tell... I am not ashamed." Juan Diaz offers to help Marie financially. She asks whether Juan Diaz wants to make a prostitute of her, and saying that she already feels like one, she refuses the offer. Juan Diaz becomes uneasy, he accuses Marie of trying to make him responsible for what has happened. "You asked me to stay... your fight was a bit of a sham... You are a strong woman, but you suddenly become weak... You could have screamed".

At this point, the narrator intervenes: she first states that she believed Juan Diaz's accusations because she "was too poisoned with shame and dishonesty about sex", but that in that situation she was not conscious about the truth of Juan's words. She felt guilty, but due to her internalized shame about sexual desire, she cannot face her own responsibility for the situation. "It was more comfortable, more respectable to think of myself as irresponsible. *And even to commit injustice against men* [my emphasis]". Next, the narrator, talking from the point of view she holds at the time of narration, claims that "now, with distance lying between me and that night, I see that this thing could never have happened without either my conscious or my unconscious consent; that had there been no unconscious response in me to the masculinity in him, he would have left the room as calmly as he came." (DE, 196). She claims that a suppressed desire had burned her for months, and that Juan Diaz,

with his animosity, had “divined things” in her, but that in the situation, she “was too dishonest to admit that she was even a passive participant”. (*DE*, 197).

Returning to the story, she recalls having accused Juan Diaz of lying, and him smiling at her “as if wondering at the duplicity and hypocrisy of women.” He blames her for contradictory behaviour, reminding her of her feminism: “You always boast of being a free woman... now you act like an innocent little girl... What right have you to throw a challenge and then blame me for taking it up?” Claiming that she is “sick of life and you” and that she does not want to live any longer, Marie asks him to go and leave her in peace, but before he goes Marie promises not to tell anyone. At this point Juan Diaz has already become apologetic, and even offers to stay with Marie for a few days. She rejects the offer; he goes. Marie presses herself against the door, sobbing. “These things that could not be recalled even when both wished it, when both regret it... it was not fair!” Thinking she cannot bear being alone, she rushes after Juan Diaz, but seeing him cross the street she decides not to call after him. Instead, she goes back into her flat, only to find a fifty-dollar note on the table. “So, he had ceased his conscience... he had paid as if he would pay a prostitute.” (*DE*, 198). Later at night Marie, unable to sleep or to forget, turns on the gas and tries to commit suicide.

With this lengthy reconstruction of the passage I have, once more, tried to grasp the logic or the meaning of the scene. What is it about? Is it about rape – or about two people yielding to passion, and consequently, about Marie discovering and giving into her sexual desires, resulting in sexual politics later asserted by Marie having a number of affairs with different men? Is it about discovery of the “true self“, sexual identity resulting in assertion of feminist sexual politics and right of a woman to decide on her own body and sexuality aided by a man who reveals Marie’s dishonesty towards herself and others? Or is it a description of sexual violence? Is it about liberation or oppression, or liberation through oppression? How does the passage link to victimization and agency? And why do I insist on reading the scene as rape when Smedley’s own interpretation suggests that Marie – with all her

hypocrisy – is to blame? Why do I question my own reading? What consequences do these different readings have, what ends would they serve, and for whom?

As I have stated above, the first time I read the passage I read it as rape. Why? First of all, my reading is based on the simple definition of rape offered by Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will* (1975:18): “If a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a *specific* man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is a criminal act of rape [my emphasis]”. According to this definition, Marie’s unconscious desires would have no business whatsoever to do with the situation. Whether or not she actually desired Juan Diaz, whether or not he “devine[d] things” in her, *she said no to this specific man*. Whether or not there was an “unconscious consent” within her, consciously she struggled, she asked him to let go several times. He, on the other hand, used violence and his physical superiority to force her to have sex with him.

Furthermore, the narrator’s reading of her own rape as her own fault so completely contradicts with her overall body politics that it either counts for a moment of complete loss of judgement, a blank moment, or an invitation to read it against its own grain. Also, the triumph in Juan Diaz’s voice, the fact that he requests Marie to tell no one and that he eases his own consciousness by leaving a large sum of money on the table imply his feelings of guilt. Brownmiller (1975:76) points out, leaving money on the table is a typical act by rapists, an attempt to turn tables and render the victim guilty of her own rape by making her appear as a prostitute. Also, it is still common to present rape news in the media by searching the motive for rape in the victim, her previous sexual relations, dress, behaviour etc. This reinforces the idea that women are not raped against their will, but because we, by wearing a short skirt, walking out late at night or by jeering at a man ask for it. All this make it difficult for women to report rape as the victims have internalized this discourse and blame themselves for the violations of their own bodies. And, yet, anyone who has ever been sexually harassed knows that in such situations one is astounded beyond words due to embarrassment and humiliation, not arousal.

Also the emphasis on Juan Diaz's curiosity about Talvar Singh suggests that the rape is only a means by which he attempts to find out about the other man's location. Thus Marie, her body and her sexuality are reified, the primary object being to find out about Talvar Singh. She is thus only a tool, her violation is not the object itself, but merely a means to make her leak information and betray a friend. Moreover, Juan Diaz, who – if we follow the logic of Marie's later interpretation – only "gives her what she asked for" and is thus constructed as a "knower" in the situation, later turns out to be a traitor within the Indian movement. Thereby he is rendered unreliable. And, still, furthermore, the question of reliability is evoked in relation to Marie herself: when Juan Diaz later attempts to use the situation as a political weapon against Marie and her husband by spreading a rumour that he has slept with Marie, she claims that she will tell the truth about the rape to everyone. Her husband, however, dismisses such suggestion by asking: "Who would listen or believe?" (*DE*, 265).³⁷ Marie is thus denied the right even to talk about the issue, which is yet another occasion where a voice attempting to address the violence against a woman is prevented from being heard. In the end, Marie who quits her marriage, the movement – and rescues Anand's political career, later takes the pain to describe the event in detail as part of her life story.

All this backs up my argument that the scene, in fact, is a depiction of a rape. Furthermore, I was not the only one to interpret it as such. Nancy Hoffman (1991) straightforwardly reads it as rape. And so did my fellow students in two different seminars when I asked them to comment on the scene.³⁸ Most of them problematized the fact that Marie invites Juan Diaz for a cup of tea. Comments

³⁷ According to the MacKinnons (1989:42), Smedley's official biographers, single women are looked upon as evil temptresses within the Hindu tradition which is the cultural background shared by the men in the Indian independence movement: "A woman does not have a positive image or high status unless she is married and has children. Single men or women who indulge in sex were considered morally weak and rendered powerless as leaders". I have asked myself whether the fact that the rapist is an Indian functions as a kind of racialized and racist displacement that enables the discussion of the rape in *Daughter of Earth*.

³⁸ These were the Gradu seminar in the English department and a seminar on feminist methodology at the University of Jyväskylä, spring 2000.

read: well anyone knows that cup of tea late at night never means a cup of tea. It was interpreted as “an invitation that is not “The” invitation”. These readings thus straightforwardly pointed out Marie’s (sic!) misunderstanding or ignorance of the social norm. The scene was read as rape, but the question of guilt was regarded as a problematic one. For nobody was it simply enough that she said no. As it was not an honest, simply no for Marie herself either.

Smedley’s later interpretation renders Marie guilty of her rape by constructing the rape not as a rape but as a psychological conflict in Marie’s own mind. Her “guiltiness” is based on the fact that she has had sexual desires and sexual affairs. This construction of the rape as an inner conflict based on her inability to cope with her own sexuality, directs the reader’s attention away from the violence and fact that it is actually something that Juan Diaz does to Marie against her will that causes the whole situation. The assault that leads to Marie’s attempt of suicide and the reification of her sexuality to a tool whereby Juan Diaz attempts to get information about another man, is rendered insignificant by the speculations about the victims dishonesty and responsibility.

But Marie not only renders herself guilty of dishonesty regarding her sexuality, she also blames herself of being unjust towards Juan Diaz: “ It was more comfortable, more respectable to think of myself as irresponsible. And even to commit injustice against men”. (*DE*, 196). Thus, she is not only “guilty” of her rape, but of hurting the rapist’s feelings! I find this outrageous, and for a moment, I agree with Usandizaga (1994) about Smedley confusing her political and private agenda due to a misogynist discourse. I interpret this as an internalization of Freudian discourse whereby there is an unconscious desire in a woman to be raped.

On the other hand, if we take the internalization of a misogynist discourse seriously, this scene can be regarded as psychological realism, and as such, an account of what actually happens in a woman’s mind at the event of rape, and of the means with which the victim seeks to cope with the traumatizing past event.

This would allow another kind of interpretation, reveal another side of the narrator's later interpretation of the rape:

By taking responsibility, and thus denying full victimization, Marie creates herself as an agent. By explaining to herself that she is a participant, at least a passive participant, she protects herself from the idea that something could actually happen to her without any possibility to prevent it from her part. If she would accept that there was nothing she could have done to prevent the violation of her body, the purpose of which was to humiliate her and to make her leak information, she would accept the full reification of her body and personality. Now, by claiming passive participation and unconscious consent, she resumes agency in the situation. By distinguishing her present mature, understanding and responsible self from her previous dishonest, victimizing and victimized self, and by claiming the dishonesty of her previous self, she distances and alienates the former, violated self from her present self, which is capable of taking responsibility and willing to do it. She thus rescues her agency. Agency is a crucial element in Smedley's feminism: she regards passivity as the major constituent of femininity, and as such the basis for their oppression. The way out of oppression requires consciousness and honesty about one's own motives, awareness of the internalized restrictions on individuals, and conscious and deliberate rejection of these restrictions. In order to fight, we need to construct ourselves as agents, capable of action and fighting against injustices.

One of the ways of doing this is to deconstruct the internalized discourses which direct our actions and thinking. In the rape scene there is an interesting – and disturbing! – intertextual link between the depiction of female sexuality in popular romance literature and the events preceding and leading to the rape: when Juan Diaz grasps Marie and approaches her, her voice starts choking. The choking voice, blurring images, nearly lost consciousness are all typical ways of depicting women's sexual arousal that precedes an undepicted (disappearing and left to imagination) intercourse. The act, or here the rape, takes place in a narrative a gap:

it is left to the readers' imagination to construct the events in between. (I will return to the issue of reader responsibility later.) Also, in popular literature the romantic climax is a moment of surrender of the female protagonist to the power of a male conqueror and his desire. (It is her desire to surrender.) This is a state where words are lost, a moment when everything melts into darkness. In *Daughter of Earth*, another such moment is in the passage where Marie embraces Knut in the desert. There, however, her feelings are those of tenderness and his lips are soft whereas the violence of Juan Diaz evokes terror. Marie's later interpretation collapses her terror of the rape with her own fear of and complex relationship to sex. Interpreted this way, it is not the rape that she fears, not the violence of Juan Diaz and the fact that he rapes her that victimizes her, but her own sexuality.

Again, from my point of view this narrative construction is politically injurious for women. Yet, if we link it to Smedley's view of the social construction of the human psyche and female sexuality, we are faced with her argument that it is precisely the contradiction between the culturally appropriated forms of the outlets of women's sexual desires that construct the inner conflict of an individual. This constructionist view, again, politicizes the personal and the psychological. In case of women's sexual desire, she sees the contradiction between the needs of the individual and the social restrictions set upon them that constructs the inner conflict. Throughout the book she also draws attention to the double standard regarding men and women's sexuality.

In a letter to a close friend, Florence Lennon, in 1924 Smedley gives a vivid account of her views on the social construction of women's complicated relationship towards sex. She draws attention to the fact that sex is a taboo, surrounded by shameful silence, and that from an early age children, especially girls, are taught that it is a disgraceful thing that no decent person even knows about. Then at the advent of marriage, everything is reversed: which earlier was a taboo, now becomes a necessity, and supposedly a source of joy and satisfaction: "Two minutes before, she was supposed to think that the sex act is a degrading,

debasement shameful act; then she is married with a few words; and society tells her that now she may have sex relations every hour of the day if she wishes." It is precisely this culturally appropriated hypocrisy that in Smedley's view constructs the inner psychological conflict of women in regards to their sexuality. By limiting the expression and existence of female desire and sexuality within the private realm of marriage, women are rendered incapable of dealing with their desire outside this realm. This also explains Marie's inability to defend herself at the event of the rape and her later interpretation of herself as the responsible party.

What renders this interpretation problematic is that it confirms and constructs Juan Diaz as the rational subject, puts him in the position of a knower whose function is to reveal Marie's true wishes to herself. This leads to the previously discussed fact that the violence of his act is ignored and trivialized, and the whole business of the rape functions as a mere stage of Marie's self-revelation. It also confirms the old – and ever still thriving! – idea that, in the end, Marie just "got what she asked for". It thus functions as a justification of sexual violence – or rather denies that violence ever to have taken place. Here, the woman's "no" is constructed as a "yes", which reinforces the image of a woman as unreliable, irrational, mysterious, dishonest, a sham. Furthermore, by creating herself as an agent and thus taking responsibility, Smedley not only legitimates Juan Diaz's behaviour but also prevents herself from countering the crime as a crime later, when it is used as a political weapon against her. Having made herself responsible for the rape, she cannot claim to have been raped, and thus violated against her own will – which might all be irrelevant, for the question remains: "who would listen or believe?" (*DE*, 265).

The issue of voice is one of the recurring themes in *Daughter of Earth*, and the fact that Marie is rendered voiceless both at the event of rape and in the romantic scene with Knut in the desert suggests that Smedley indeed regards socially, economically and psychologically constructed femininity as the worst enemy of women. Smedley's emphasis on the issue of voice, the repeated exposure of marginalized voices suppression, the depiction of women as muted, as lacking a

language and agency to voice their experience is the most powerful feminist message of the book. Women as a body (in both meanings of the word) should struggle to voice their experiences. In Smedley's case the gaining of the voice and the assertion of her authority unfortunately involves othering other women, but if such techniques enabled women to enter literary life in the first place, we the readers need to make a point of reading through the disguises that first enabled an earlier generation of women to voice their experiences. Our duty is both to grant those women for their ingenuity, to expose and explore the strategies that have enabled further subversions of the literary traditions and to discover a language to talk about the issues social situations which still in *Daughter of Earth* were marked by the mutilations of women's voices.

Reliability is an issue of concern for women both as victims of rape and as authors. The fact that ever since Eve with her famous apple one of the main components of femininity has in the (?) western tradition (and others, too) been mischievousness. This is one of the reasons why rape has been the crime most easy to claim and the most difficult to prove. Feminists, on the other hand, have had most difficulties in gaining public recognition for the importance of issues concerning women, to "smuggle" them into the public realm and discussion. One of the means, and to start with the only one, of doing this has been to use patriarchal language and discourses to do this, as is the case with Smedley. In a sense, the whole business with rape in *Daughter of Earth* can be seen as an allegory of the feminist struggle for authority: Marie's interpretation of the rape, if not Juan Diaz's violent penetration into her body, can be seen as the intrusion of patriarchal discourses into women's minds, language and their perception of themselves. The recognition of the violence of this act leads to Marie to assert her sexual freedom, just as feminists, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous among others, have promoted the importance of creating a new language to speak of women's experiences.

Interpreting the scene as psychological realism links it to the overall project in *Daughter of Earth*: self-construction, whereby new meanings are given to the

things of the past. The rape scene captures the process of negotiating meanings for a traumatizing event, of one's own position in it, attitudes towards it. The passage also outlines (showing the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis with its emphasis on the power of the unconscious on one's actions) Smedley's view of the subject. She rejects the rational humanist concept of the self, and emphasizes the power of the unconscious on her own behaviour. On the other hand, in her re-reading of the past event, she claims to have revealed this unconscious, and establishes her own sexual drive/desire as the key-function and the driving force of the rape. By doing this, she in a sense recaptures the humanist rationality and unitarity of the self as a constitutive basis of her new identity. Thereby she appears to resort to the idea of false consciousness – i.e. her previous consciousness – that now makes room for the new, more enlightened consciousness.

In another, earlier letter Smedley approaches the matter from a slightly different angle, regarding men's and women's relation more generally. Nevertheless, the underlying point of the double standard, power struggle and the wider social consequences of the suppression of desire remains. She writes: "I am not willing to accept our present social standards of woman's place or man's place, because I do not think that present society is *rational* or normal, either as regards men or women or the classes. I bow to nature, but I don't bow to a social system which has its foundation in the desire of a dominant class for power. That system perverts the very source of life, starting with the home [Engels type of socialism] and the schools [ideology as in Althusser]. Thousands of women are crushed [and made] *inarticulate* [not having found their voice, that is] by that system and never develop as their natures would force them to develop were they in a decent environment." (MacKinnons 1988:89)

Marie's environment is not decent: she becomes a victim of the double standard, victim of her sexual politics. Trying to combine two political engagements she is on the one hand bound by the conservative, misogynist attitudes of the Indians, and would by openly asserting her sexual politics handicap her work in the movement

(lose her political reliability). On the other hand, submitting herself to the cultural restrictions on sexuality, she would compromise on her feminist political agenda. As a final resolution, Marie refuses the reification of her body and the reduction of her personality to a mere body. She quits both her marriage and the political movement, which could count to suggest that what appears a manifestation of internalized misogyny, in the end is but yet another narrative strategy, yet another displacement, whereby the exposure of the realities of women's lives was rendered possible.

The scene seems to escape any imposition of a final interpretation on it. It remains problematic and ambiguous despite Marie's taking the blame. As I have argued above, it can be argued that this happens because she wants to construct agency for herself. Or, it may well be that this is a narrative tactic that allows her to talk about the rape – for would it be there if it were straightforwardly judged as a crime? If it was named a rape? Would it have been both a reality impossible to live with and to expose in a novel? Is it that by this, from my point of view politically injurious, narrative strategy Smedley both personally gains psychological and thereby political agency and enables the issue to be discussed at all? For Virginia Woolf the strategy may have been her resort to androgyny, as some feminist critics have argued (Moi 1985:12-13), and for Jane Austen it may have been the establishment of free indirect speech as high art (Lanser 1992) that enabled them to accommodate the requirements of femininity to the phallic act of writing. Perhaps Smedley's resort to misogynist narrative strategies as have been discussed above is but yet another way of smuggling feminist issues and social taboos into literature.

8. EPILOGUE: FURTHER POSSIBLE SUBVERSIONS

“Daughter of Earth... is more likely to change its readers’ lives than their esthetic theories.” - Nancy Hoffman –

We cannot change where we come from, but we can always try and find our ways out of our past. In my reading through the narrative strategies whereby Marie/Smedley constructs an identity for herself I have discussed a number of subversions of narrative conventions and plots of female protagonists. I have pointed out occasions and strategies whereby misogynist discourses and practices are revealed, challenged, highlighted, depicted, discussed, overthrown, and – in places – applied. Subversions take place within representation, and I hope to have unravelled possibilities for them throughout my analysis.

There is, however, one more set of possible subversions that I would like to discuss. In *Daughter of Earth*, Smedley, by drawing attention to her class position, poignantly and accurately shows how women’s affiliations and loyalties are divided along class. Throughout the 1990’s feminists have highlighted a number of other positions of difference which deconstruct the notion of women created by the white middle-class Western feminists in the course of the second wave of feminism since the 1960’s. Women of colour, lesbian, disabled, Third World, and other feminists have raised their voices and brought a whole new range of issues into the discussion on sex and gender, patriarchal order and the notion of “Woman”. I was introduced to feminism primarily due these discussions, and thus, when I first started working on *Daughter of Earth*, was myself quite aware of the differences between my own and Smedley’s subject positions. I saw myself reaching over gaps formed by the Atlantic, language, generation, class, nationality, and ethnicity (I emphasized her Native American heritage).

A closer reading of the book, however, led me to question the categories whereby subject positions in feminist research are determined. My reading was marked both by identifications and disidentifications, which seemed incongruous with the

categories of difference I have so far found in the feminist literature as the basis for subject positions. The identifications I found lay for example in the father's high-handed decisions to move the family about the country in search of prosperity. I recognized the crying mother, if not the beatings. I identified with Marie's will to learn, lack of guidance in how or what to read, and the alienation in the *classroom*, even though in my case the class positions were reversed, libraries were full of books, and I never had to cope with obscene poverty. I also recognized the political ignorance combined with instinctive awareness of structural formation of social ills as well as the unquestioning, passionate love for the persons who provided the concepts and tools to verbalize it. I recognized the depression and desperation created in the realm of heterosexual relationship that drive one into a sobbing and shaking pile of cloth, flesh and bone with no vision of the future, hardly any agency and very limited understanding of who one actually is or might be. I recognized the need for identity, and the feeling of not belonging fully to any given category.³⁹

Now, looking at the matter again from a more global perspective, I recognize that my identification with Marie is to a great extent based on the shared position as white, educated, heterosexual English speaker. In the search for the identity Smedley creates for herself, I have lost myself in the Marxist, psychoanalytic and feminist discourses, the early 20th century U.S. history, women's position and struggles for emancipation, equal pay, birth control, vote, anti-imperial world politics, questions of representation, politics of identity and misogyny. At the same time, I have come to share the above discourses with Smedley, which further undermines the categories I assumed as the basis of our differences.

When visiting the International Women's University in August 2000 Gayatri Spivak rather mockingly remarked that these days everybody wants or tries to belong to marginalia. This is exactly what I have just done by locating the points of

³⁹ Having grown up in a working-class area as a member of a middle-class family, I resist the idea that my family background would determine my class-position solely as middle class. If all the other people I spent my time with and related to would be children of factory workers, and people from purely middle-class background would mostly bore me to death, which category do I belong to?

my identification with Smedley's *alter ego* outside the established categories of differentiation within the private, the emotional and personal experience. The point I wish to make is that perhaps this tendency to marginalize oneself is due to the fact that with the current preoccupation with difference (or *differance*) feminist debates have themselves marginalized the possibility to theorize and create alternative spaces to seek similarities. This is the twist or project I wish to engage in in the future, and my conviction of its importance is rooted in the fact that the greatest, recent achievements of global women's movements such as the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995, have been made possible by focusing on similarities or similar tendencies facing and affecting women's lives across the Globe despite our enormous differences.

It has taken me two years since the first time I read *Daughter of Earth* on a wind-swept island of Fuerteventura to finally be able to write the epilogue to my thesis. At that time, I was, like Marie in the beginning of *Daughter of Earth* gathering up the bits and pieces of myself, recovering from a tormenting relationship with a man whose politics I embraced, yet with whom I could not live. Instead of writing a novel about my life, however, I read *Daughter of Earth*, and decided to write my thesis on it. I clung to the analysis of a story of survival instead of having to write one of my own. Thanks to generations of brave feminists, I had a history, female role models to hold on to.

By the time I first read *Daughter of Earth*, I was rather engaged in reading and learning post-structuralist theory, deconstruction, psychoanalysis. My orientation was rather philosophical, I had little to do with practical issues, knew little about women's on-going struggles in the world. Now, sitting here, I realize how far I have moved from those debates, and how much more urgent issues than deconstruction of psychoanalysis there are in the world. *Daughter of Earth* has helped me to gain back the earth, and I reach out for women like Smedley. Another Agnes, a Singaporean activist working with and for South-Asian women workers, will be waiting to get my copy of *Daughter of Earth* somewhere in Asia. More than

ever, I am aware that should I stay in the academia, it will be my task and duty to contribute to women's world-wide struggle to equality by constructing us as historical, contemporary and future agents.

In the newly renovated house of parliament, the German Bundestag, in Berlin the meetings of the members of the parliament take place under a glass dome on top of which the public can walk. The architect who designed it explained this by saying that the members of the parliament should thus be reminded of their responsibility towards the people. As a white, Western, somewhat middle-class, educated, nearly-native English-speaking feminist, I am aware of the privilege of my position. In many ways, I am under the dome. For me, the task of feminism, and for me as a feminist, remains to unravel and challenge physical, textual, economic and cultural violations against women. As old-fashioned as it may sound to those promoting post-feminist gender studies, for me, academic work is a form of activism that should serve women as a body, again in both meanings of the word.

At the moment, I teach women's studies at the university of Jyväskylä. In this position, aware of how easy it is to lose oneself in the privileges of the ivory-tower, I consider that one of the most important aims of women's studies is to seek possible alliances across the multitude of subject positions occupied by women of different colour, class, sexual orientation, religion, bodily and psychic abilities, culture, nationality, ethnic background, access to power, geographical and historical location. The list of possible differences can never be exhausted, the legitimate and extremely important deconstructive project of feminism is to try. At the same time, however, as we construct these differential positions, we must – acknowledging the differences that stand on the way of any given *sisterhood* – seek to exhaust the list of possible alliances. At the same time as we deconstruct the Woman, we as feminists within the academia as students, scholars, teachers, consciously sought to construct a *sistership*, possibility to relate to others who identify themselves as women. What kind of an inexhaustible list would we end up

with?⁴⁰ Building up bridges between women's movements and academic feminists as well as other positions that divide and separate women is not an easy task. Full sistership as a goal remains a utopia, but can serve as an ideal in the search for new possible subversions of patriarchal orders.

*Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need
For this bright morning dawning for you.
History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if faced,
With courage, need not be lived again.*

*Lift up your eyes upon
This day breaking for you
Give birth again
To the dream*

Maya Angelou, "On the Pulse of Morning"

⁴⁰ Luce Irigaray's proposal to promote positive identifications between women manifested in the French plural feminine pronoun "elles", "they", in *je, tu, nous*; Judith Butler's deconstruction of the term "woman" in *Gender Trouble*, and a very different text, or rather a tool, Logical Framework Analysis which involves the reversal of identified problems into objectives in the Project Cycle Management used in designing development projects. It is also rooted in the awareness of the fact that the greatest, recent achievements of global women's movements such as the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995, have been made possible by focusing on similarities or similar tendencies facing and affecting women's lives across the Globe despite our enormous differences.

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