

Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Dr Moulay Tahar University of Saida
Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts
Department of English



Modernism from the Margins: Unruly Women and the Politics of Representation

Nella Larsen, Anzia Yezierska, and Evelyn Scott as a case study

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Presented by:

Mrs. Kies/Zerrouki Nezha

Mrs. Mordi Kheira

Supervised by:

Dr. Benadla Djamel

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Dedication

We would like to dedicate this work to our friends, and special thanks to our both families for their unfailing support and patience to complete this study. Our thought goes to the memory of our defunct fathers who would have been very proud.

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Abstract

Nella Larsen, Anzia Yezierska and Evelyn Scott were hailed among the leaders of the American modernist movement between 1920s and 1940s for their prominent works in poetry, drama and fiction. Their works have contributed in term of newness, structure and form to the American modernist period. These works had challenged conventional forms, the three writers were all rule breakers, who penned controversial autobiographical works describing their misfortune and documenting their cultural outsidership in modern America ruled by males who suggested they were a failure because they all attempted the impossible. The misrepresentation of these writers had made their work dismissed from the literary canon, though it remains among the most innovative of the American modernists who wrote about women. This became an area of investigation for feminist theorists whose objective was to recover these writers' works and show that it is worth being studied. This dissertation aims at finding the importance of these writers' contribution to the modernist movement.

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To have one's individuality completely ignored
is like being pushed quite out of life- like
being blown out as one blows out a light.

(Evelyn Scott)

Introduction

Nella Larsen, Anzia Yezierska and Evelyn Scott were hailed among the leaders of the American modernist movement between 1920s and 1940s, for their prominent works in poetry, drama and fiction. Their works have contributed in term of newness, structure and form to the American modernist period. These works had challenged conventional forms, the three writers were all rule breakers, who penned controversial autobiographical works describing their misfortune, and documenting their cultural outsidership in modern America ruled by males who suggested they were a failure, because they all attempted the impossible.

Larsen, Yezierska and Scott are the subject of our analysis, wondering how could such gifted and talented writers disappear from the literary sight though they received recognition from highly qualified institutions? (“A Guggenheim” fellowship for Nella, “Zona Gale” for Yezierska and Scott was among the main literary figures of her time). Nevertheless, these women’s works were said to be false, inauthentic and immoral because, they reflected their rebellion and resistance to the patriarchal culture. That culture was made by men, controlled by men, reviewed through the eyes of men, and eventually evaluated by men. These women have shattered the male’s quiet kingdom where he used to be the sole ruler. Larsen, Yezierska and Scott’s works preceded that of males who were both frightened and jealous, and did their best to dismiss these writers from the literary canon. May be this is the reason behind this disappearance or they may have disappeared because they broke the social boundaries, they were powerless and lacked an organizing body that represents them.

These forgotten writers were rediscovered thanks to the rise in feminism and multiculturalism of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, which priority was uncovering and spreading these texts. This project of recovery has given a chance to these writers to be brought back to the literary scene, through Michel Foucault’s theory that addressed the relationship between power and knowledge which are used as a form of social control through society institutions.

The popular uprising against the colonial authority of the British crown (1775-1783) had made from the United States of America the first modern nation. Thanks to the cultural diversity of its citizens who immigrated voluntarily and unvoluntarily from Europe, Asia, and Africa to start a new life in America, this nation had provided a model of a liberal state where American novelists and mainly women writers like Nella Larsen, Anzia Yezierska, and Evelyn Scott penned high modernist tales. They depicted many of the social, economic, and racial anxieties that troubled them, regardless of the social norms. The three writers shared a common quality, they were alienated, rule breakers and their works dismissed. These marginalized writers were angry women who penned controversial lives that was the only opportunity to express themselves, despite the racial and social barriers placed in their ways.

Larsen depicts her mixed-race issue in her only novels *Quicksand* and *Passing* where she is in search for an identity in which she can fit. Yezierska pens the Jewish immigrants' life in the tenement dwellers, the struggle of the females to support their males, and the patriarchal issue in all her novels, mainly in *Bread Givers* where she is dedicated to art over motherhood, paving her way to Americanize. Whereas Scott relates her elopement with a married man, twice her age, in *Escapade* struggling with her identity as a mother, and depicting the female's body and the pregnancy as well. These three writers were excluded from the canon of autobiographical writing that claims to define one's identity, they were constantly reminded of being females. They fought against being the other or the outsider in the literary tradition. Therefore, reconstruction and re-evaluation of this canon became of the major tasks of feminist literary criticism during the 1970s, and was very successful in bringing these writers to the literary scene.

Our present study intends to bring to light the importance of Larsen, Yezierska and Scott's contribution to the modernist movement, which emerged because of the decline of civilization that was overwhelmed by the new technology. They depicted the inner-self and consciousness of their characters because they saw, in the increased capitalism, the alienation of the individual that led to his isolation and loneliness. Their tales were more of a stream of consciousness. In short, they were innovators who defy

expectations. Despite this, their works were dismissed and only were unearthed during the rise in feminism and multiculturalism of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

1. The Emergence of Identity Politics

The political arguments that focus upon the interests and perspectives of groups, with which people identify, are called identity politics, where people's politics may be shaped by aspects of their identity through correlated social organizations. It includes social organizations based on race, class, religion, gender, ethnicity, nation, ideology, culture, sexual orientation, literary preferences, history.... These movements started during the second half of the twentieth century. Identity politics can most be found in class movements, feminist movements, post colonial movement, gay, lesbians and bisexual movements. Minority influence is a central component of identity politics, where the majority is influenced by the beliefs or behaviors of a minority. Knowing and constructing ones identity lays upon the relationship between self and other.

Unlike the other societies, who are characterized by a distinctive stereotype, the United States' citizens live in a melting pot society with many cultural backgrounds. America is seen as a land of opportunities, and there, the poor and the marginalized of the world have met and transformed into Americans. Despite their assimilation to the American culture, these people are pervaded with their former identities. They are constantly in search for a frame where they can conserve their culture, while assimilated to the new one. These minorities felt the need to articulate their oppression by autobiographical writings, music, movies... and make human rights aware of their marginality. In their works, Larsen, Yezierska and Scott depict the burden of racial, gender and class discrimination, insisting on self-definition and self determination that express their consciousness, and develop their feminist thought which is best expressed and understood with the context of their own self authorities. Yet, these writers' works were considered false and transgressing boundaries of social and cultural norms by their contemporaries. Fortunately, these forgotten works of Larsen, Yezierska and Scott have been read by feminists and multi-culturalists of the 1970s,

and beyond making their re-emergence into the literary scene of priority and concern of the feminist and multiculturalist movements.

2. The Presentation of Chapters

We conducted our research about these forgotten writers, upon three chapters. Each chapter examines the way every writer challenges the social boundaries of her contemporaries, bearing in mind that Larsen, Yeziarska and Scott living in New York and are literary contemporaries of the 1920s, came from different backgrounds. In chapter one, we depict Nella Larsen's works *Quicksand* and *Passing*, examining their controversial elements, mainly Helga's entrapment in her *Quicksand* and Clare's mysterious death in *Passing* which coined Larsen's works as ambiguous and with controversial endings. In chapter two, we consider Anzia Yeziarska's struggle within a patriarchal society, and her lust for the Americanization, through the characters of Sara Smolinsky, in *Bread Givers*, and the Jewish mothers' struggle in *The Fat of the Land*. Yeziarska's devotion to her art over motherhood and her critique of the traditional Jewish patriarchal society have made her work dismissed and out of the literary canon.

The third chapter deals with Evelyn Scott's narration of her controversial life, depicting her elopement with a married man in *Escapade*, and the reconstruction of a southern identity abroad in *Migrations*. These two novels have embodied the transgressions of social and cultural norms, which incited her expulsion from the canon and her society. In the concluding part, we try to shed light upon the real reasons that had put these once famous writers into obscurity, and what had disturbed these male critics and readers, and why they pen Larsen, Yeziarska and Scott's as inauthentic, immoral and false. These marginalized writers have given meaning to women's movements, and uncovered the reality about their suffering by exposing their own experiences, as a female jew for Yeziarska, a half cast outsider for Larsen and a rebellious southern woman for Scott.

Chapter I

Nella Larsen the Mystery Woman of the Harlem Renaissance

1. Introduction

Nella Larsen, the American novelist, has been re-introduced to fame in 1980, after being forgotten, by Mary Helen Washington, a literary critic, who wrote an essay in “Ms Magazine” introducing Nella Larsen as “Mystery woman of the Harlem Renaissance”. Washington wrote: “fifty years after the heyday of her very brief literary career, Larsen is for the most part, unknown, unread and dismissed” (351). In 1928, Thelma Berlack, another critic, wrote in “New Amsterdam New York News” about Nella Larsen describing her as a modern woman, for she smokes, wears her dresses short, does not believe in religion, churches and feels that people of the artistic type have a definite chance to help solve the race problem. (335) She referred to the author as “Madam X”. This characterization has offered fertile soil for speculation, for critics and biographers, who have cast Larsen’s life and work not only as objects of mystery and ambiguity but also as misrepresentations of Larsen’s own creation. They consider her novel *Quicksand* as a semi-biographical and both novels, *Quicksand* and *Passing*, as false, unbelievable or impossible.

Even during the heyday of her career, marked by popular interest in her background, Larsen’s texts depict problems without solutions. Her unfinished work and even life kept critics busy to determine what exactly happened in this mysterious life, and these ambiguous open-ended texts. Who is Nella Larsen? On the 13th April 1891 was born the American novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, Nellie Walker, in a poor district of Chicago “Levee”. Her father is Peter Walker, a mixed race Afro-Caribbean immigrant, who died when Nellie was very young. Her mother Marie Walker, a Danish immigrant, was a seamstress and a domestic worker, she married Peter Larsen, a Danish immigrant, and had a daughter, Anna. Nellie took her stepfather’s surname and changed Nellie to Nella, and finally settled on “Nella Larsen”. The family then moved West to a mostly white neighborhood of German and

Scandinavian immigrants, where they faced discrimination because of Nella's dark skin. As a result, the Larsen family moved back East. (Hutchinson. In search of Nella Larsen)

The Author and critic, Darryl Pinckney, wrote about her anomalous situation,

as a member of a white immigrant family, she [Larsen] had no entrée into the world of the blues or of the black church. If she could never be white like her mother and sister, neither could she ever be black in quite the same way that Langston Hughes and his characters were black. Hers was a netherworld, unrecognizable historically and too painful to dredge up. (26)

Larsen moved later to Denmark, where racial lines are more fluid and where she had good memories of that time. She then returned to Chicago and attended a public school. The racial segregation had increased in the neighborhood with the increase of black immigrants to the city. As a young girl, Nella attended a black university in Nashville, Tennessee. It was the first time that Nella found herself living within a black community whose members are most American blacks from the south. Therefore, Nella had no connection with them, she was neither white nor black, she was not even from the south, and she struggled to find a place where she could belong. (Hatchinson. Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line.)

In 1914, Nella enrolled the nursing school at New York City's Lincoln Hospital which is founded as a nursing home to serve the blacks, but ironically, she found herself surrounded with white male doctors and black female nurses. Concerning this situation, Pinckney wrote: "no matter what situation Larsen found herself in, racial irony of one kind or another unvariably wrapped itself around her." (Shadows). Many feminists fought for the equality of rights for both, women and the African Americans; however, their accomplishments only benefited the white-middle class women, neglecting the issues of race, patriarchy, class, and sexual preferences as if women are a homogenous population without any differences. That is why postcolonial feminism had sought to bring the voices of black immigrants and the third world women who are combating patriarchy, inequality, and class oppression.

In general, women were alienated and excluded from jobs because of the lack of education, since they were not allowed to aim at a higher education. Only men were intitled to pursue their university studies. This explains how Larsen found herself in the lowest scale at a hospital ruled by white men doctors to whom she must be obedient and must suffer both, race and gender inequalities. Once graduated, Larsen went to Alabama, where she worked as head nurse at the hospital's training school. Later, she decided to quit because of the poor working conditions, and the school authorities dislike of her appearance and manner. In 1919, Larsen married Elmer Ines, the second African American to receive a P.H.D. in physics. A year after her marriage, she published her first short stories. The couple moved to Harlem in 1920, where Larsen had to struggle again.

As Pinckney wrote about Nella Larsen saying,

By virtue of her marriage, she was a member of Harlem's black professional class. She and her husband knew the NAACP leadership [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]: W.E.B. Du Bois [William Edward Burghardt Du Bois], Walter White, James Weldon Johnson. However, because of her low birth and mixed parentage, and because she didn't have a college degree, Larsen was alienated from the life of the black middle class, with its emphasis on school and family ties, its fraternities and sororities. (28)

In 1921, Larsen worked hard to prepare for the first exhibition of "Negro Art" at the New York Public Library, it opened the way for her to integrate the black society. In October 1925, Larsen encountered health problems and took a sabbatical from her job, she then started to write her first novel. In 1928, Larsen published *Quicksand*, an autobiographical novel, and in 1929, she published *Passing*, her second novel. Both novels were critically successful.

In *Quicksand*, Nella Larsen explores the feeling of being an outsider, she explores this sensation with her protagonist, Helga Crane, who is in constant search of her identity. Helga tries on many identities but no one fits. As a teacher, Helga lives among blacks in the south where she is forced to conform to the white-imposed traditions and structures because of her light skin. As a niece, she is accepted by her uncle but rejected by his racist wife. As a black woman, she has to fit the racial line

between a “mullato” among blacks or “other” among whites, which she does not. Once married, Helga finds herself trapped again in an imposed identity, the one of a wife and a mother which she cannot escape, she adheres to a religion that demands to give up her identity for the sake of her children. As a mother, she does not want to abandon them, she does not want them to live her traumatic experience of being abandoned. (Hatchinson. In search of Nella Larsen)

Whereas, Nella’s second novel, *Passing*, dealt with issues related to two mixed-race African American women, they were childhood companions and had taken different paths. The book explored their experience of coming together again as adults. In 1930, Larsen published *Sanctuary*, a short story for which she was accused of plagiarism, it was said to resemble the British writer Sheila-Kay-Smith’s short story *Mrs. Adis*, for the dialogues and descriptions which seemed to be identical to Smith’s work. But later, the Scholar Pearce H had taken issue with this assessment comparing both works, and stating that *Sanctuary* is longer and better written. It deals with political issues and specifically race issue rather than class in *Mrs. Adis*. He added that Larsen reworked and updated the tale into modern American black context. (16)

No plagiarism charges were proved and Larsen was granted “A Guggenheim” Fellowship which she used to travel to Europe spending time in Mallorca and Paris. After encountering domestic problems in 1931, Larsen divorced and returned to New York in 1933. She lived on her ex-husband’s allowance until his death in 1942. Struggling with depression, she stopped writing and returned to nursing where she became an administrator. Consequently, Larsen disappeared from the literary circle and never returned to Harlem, avoiding contact with earlier world. In 1964, at the age of 72, Larsen died in her apartment in Brooklyn. In his *Review for Quicksand* (1928), William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, the black intellectual thinker, regarded Nella Larsen as a major figure in the development of modern black art. He lauded her as the author of “The best piece of fiction that Negro American has produced” (187).

2. The Harlem Renaissance

African American people suffered a lot because of discrimination and social alienation which means for them, fewer opportunities of work, education, health-care.... They suffered of instability and insecurity as well, for those who had a chance, they worked hard in mines, fields and houses. Black Americans could not interfere neither in politics nor in economy nor in society, they faced racial problems even in their daily life. Looking for class equality and better life, African Americans migrated from southern to northern cities in the decade between 1920s and 1930s i.e. shifting from rural way of life to an urban and industrialized one. Harlem district in New York City was a refuge for black immigrants whose number increased day after day, more blacks went to Harlem to taste freedom and social equality.

Remarkable waves of immigrants marked this area and made it an important place for different activities, important figures and scholars talked about this new kind of immigration and the great importance of Harlem district within the black American community, and some of these scholars described it as a holy place. Harlem district became a vibrant economic area and a center for different activities, more opportunities were available for its people and they took all chances of education, work,...to reinforce themselves. Basing on their new life there, they started to rebuild their lost identity. Some voices started to shout up through the practice of politics and other kinds of important activities, Harlem refugees wanted to show America that the only difference they had was the skin's color and it was no more a barrier for them.

Literature was one of the powerful arms, black people used to protect their folk and to defend themselves as legal society members. They used it to gain political, economic and social equality outside Harlem. Original artistic works were produced there and important literary activities were organized by high educated and intellectual blacks. A cultural vibration was created in Harlem district and led to what was called The Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance was part of the post World War One cultural upheaval, also called (New Negro Movement), this movement was more than a social or a literary movement and it referred to renewing the black cultural identity in Harlem district which was a refuge for the discriminated Africans in urban

cities , by 1910 Harlem had become a spirited community that provided continuity and support for African American artists and intellectuals who had powerful voices for racial pride such as William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and James Weldon Johnson. (Harlem Renaissance Multimedia Resources)

The Harlem Renaissance had emerged also because of African Americans' disappointment regarding the limited opportunities opened to them such as labor shortage which forced a new awareness of disparity between the promised democracy and the reality. Moreover African American soldiers who served in WWI were angered by the prejudice they encountered home compared to the greater acceptance they had found in Europe. All these had boosted African Americans and motivated them to organize political and economic movements, they started helping young artists, by opening up publishing opportunities, and pumping cash into Harlem night life. Harlem became quickly an important place, formed by its new immigrants; it was not only an urbanized area but also a place of affirmation and inspiration.

“The Crisis” (1910) a monthly magazine which was originally subtitled “A Record of the Darker Races”, was edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, a black prominent protester and a leader of colored movement ,this magazine became an outlet for black writers and artists to show up their artistic works, as well as political leaders and decision makers to show their opinions and thoughts , “The Crisis” and other important magazines gave a valuable opportunity to black writers to produce a variety of original literary works where they focused on the most important topics dealing with African Americans' life such as race pride, racism, African heritage , religion....

The 19th century was known as Jazz age because Jazz music, Blues and crazy dances were created during Harlem Renaissance by blacks, after being inspired by their African heritage. Most of these arts were created and performed in Harlem night clubs which attracted great audience. Consequently, these kinds of music became popular and wide spread in the whole country. Famous night clubs such as “Savoy Ball Room” also called (the home of happy feet) and talented artists such as Louis Armstrong, a great trumpet player, were behind Jazz' fame. After the Harlem Renaissance Movement's spread, white Americans became interested in the new

Negro movement which was embraced not only by black artists, but by whites as well. The readers continued to rediscover the literature of The Harlem Renaissance which had at that time two different destinations that divided the writers into two main groups, one was calling for art for its own sake; however, the other group was calling for political privileges through art. (Harlem Renaissance Multimedia Resources)

The writers became responsible toward their culture and their race, and they had to defend their rights and protect their cultural heritage, they followed two different streams of thoughts led by intellectuals and thinkers. For Du Bois, the black writers had a hard responsibility to gain political rights which can be taken by the focus on the portraiture of black Bourgeois to legitimize their culture. According to this school of thought, Bourgeois class was more civilized and the Harlem writers could show America that black people were educated, and African intellectuals could produce a worthy literary works. These writers opened a sight through which, America could have an idea about black civilized people life. But this stereotype led these writers, unconsciously, to be themselves racists within their own community where they neglected completely the ordinary poor people. (Du Bois. Record of the Darker Race)

On the opposite side, another school of thought with other thinkers such as Langston Huges and Zora Neal Hurston who believed that black ordinary person would be better portrayed, and how could this person from the African lower class survive and resisted his miserable life with the simple means he had, and how could the weakest member of the American society preserve his folk and showed it to America and to the world as well. (Locke, Alin. Art of Propaganda. Harlem)

3. About *Quicksand* and *Passing*

Nella Larsen's novels, *Quicksand* and *Passing* have made her fame. They were critically acclaimed. *Quicksand* is an autobiographical account of a mixed-race woman, Helga Crane, the protagonist who breaks the conventions of a religious society, searching to achieve traced goals. Unfortunately, she finds herself drawn by her routine of a boring life that enchains her forever. Whereas, *Passing* depicts the reality of people who pretend to be what they are not. Clare, the main character, is a

mullato with a fair skin, she *passes* as white and still wants to be a part of the black society. Clare's childhood friend, Irene, becomes an important member of the black society. The novel begins with the childhood friends' encounter as adults, and it ends with the death of Clare and the relief of Irene who gets rid of a rival.

3.a. Entrapped in *Quicksand* (1928)

Helga Crane is a fictional character based on Larsen's early life's experiences, she is a young mixed-race teacher in a Negro school in Naxos in Georgia. She is the daughter of a Danish white mother and a West Indian black father who died soon after she was born. Deeply lonely as a child, Helga has not been able to identify herself as either white or black, not able to feel at ease with her European-American family. She moved to several places in the United States searching a place where she can fit. *Quicksand* starts with Helga's decision to leave Naxos and move to Chicago because of the school's racial politics, she breaks her engagement to James Vayle, a fellow teacher, and leaves the school's principal, Dr Anderson, to whom she is attracted. Helga moves then to Chicago and lives with her white uncle whose white wife rejects her for her mixed-race. (Nella, Larsen. *Quicksand & Passing*)

Helga Crane goes to Harlem in New York, where she encounters a hypocritical black middle class obsessed with the race problem which makes her tired of the race conscious culture in Harlem, and leaves again, for Denmark, to live with her aunt Katrina and her uncle Poul. There, she is treated like a beautiful queen and she has a marriage proposal that she rejects. Helga returned to Harlem to attend her friend's wedding, Ann, with Dr Anderson to whom she was attracted before. Close to a mental break down, Helga finds God and marries a black southern preacher, they move to Alabama and live in poverty. She has frequent pregnancies, suffers a lot and renounces to God during a serious illness related to child birth. Disillusioned with religion, her husband with whom she fails to find sexual fulfillment, Crane fantasizes about leaving her husband but never does. She is doomed to poverty and misery. (Nella, Larsen. *Quicksand & Passing*)

Though Larsen has never claimed explicitly her novels to be autobiographical, she would thus trust her reader's imagination to make the link between her life and that of Helga, the protagonist of *Quicksand*. Nella is a mixed-race girl, daughter of a Danish lady and a Negro father, and so is Helga, a mulatto daughter of a Danish mother and a Negro father, and both, Larsen and Helga, have a family in Denmark. As *Quicksand* opens, the reader is introduced to a beautiful young intellectual woman, Helga, who bears a striking resemblance to Larsen,

Black, very broad brows over soft, yet penetrating, dark eyes, and a pretty mouth, whose sensitive and sensuous lips had a slight questioning petulance and tiny dissatisfied droop were the features on which the observer's attention would fasten; though her nose was good, her ears delicately chiseled, and her curly blue-black hair plentiful and always straying in a little wayward, delightful way. (2) *Quicksand*.

Through Helga, Nella Larsen has enveloped her own life story in *Quicksand*, it contains traces of her own life. As she writes of her protagonist, "Helga could neither conform nor be happy in her unconformity". Her search takes her to the upper echelons of Harlem society, where she initially finds comfort among the upper class Negro, the black bourgeois, soon she gets fed up with what she perceives as hypocritical, Helga decides that she does not belong to these dark segregated people so she goes to Copenhagen, hoping to find a place among her white family. There, she is surrounded with attention and love but she realizes that she does not belong to them, her appearance as an exotic and attractive half cast grants her this treatment. Feeling homesick for Negro, Helga returns to Harlem where she finds herself in a gutter, once in rural Alabama, that represents the lowest point in Helga's life. She tries to find the place where she can fit but never finds it. She is homeless and identityless, lost and alone, trapped by her children, she cannot escape her *quicksand*.

3.b. Ambiguity of *Passing* (1929)

In this story, Clare and Irene are two childhood friends, both of African and European ancestry. They lost touch when Clare's father died and she moved in with

two paternal white aunts. Clare's skin is so fair that she decides to *pass* as a white woman and marries a white racist man, while Irene marries a black doctor in Harlem. The novel begins as the two childhood friends meet later in life, everyone is fascinated and seduced by the other's lifestyle. Irene becomes suspicious that her husband is having an affair with her friend Clare. Clare is attending a party when her husband learns of her mixed-race origin, he was so furious that he rushes into the party and confronts her "so you're a nigger, a damned dirty nigger!"(238). In this party, Clare falls mysteriously from the window to her death. There is a possibility that Irene has pushed her, though it is not really clear. (Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand & Passing*)

Passing depicts more Larsen's psychological life than her autobiography as in her first novel, it explores the encounters between Irene Redfield, a member of Harlem bourgeois, enjoying social and material comfort, and her *Passing* childhood friend Clare Kendry. Though she *passes* for a white lady, Clare lusts for colored society which makes Irene uncomfortable, stating to her husband Brian: "it's a funny thing about "passing" we disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it" (185). Clare confesses to Irene during their first encounter "you have had all the things I wanted and never had had it made me more determined to get them, and others" (159), Clare's wanting to have a luxurious life makes her *pass* for a white woman, whereas Irene is wiser, she strives for a safe life and avoids living dangerously. (Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand & Passing*)

Harlem symbolizes for both, Clare and Irene, freedom and security where they can live without fear of being denounced but, unfortunately, this free space is invaded by Bellew, Clare's husband, who discovers his wife's racial identity and rushes to her. This annoys Irene who does not want to see Clare free from Bellew, which means that Clare is going to shatter her carefully-made world. Wanting to preserve her quiet life and her husband, Irene rushes to Clare, what happens next is ambiguous. The most important thing for Irene is that Clare will not scramble her sweet home. Irene has always protected the security and the stability of her life, no matter what the cost is, even sacrificing her best friend Clare, whose divorce means the destruction of Irene's

stability and sense of security. Though Irene's involvement in Clare's death is ambiguous, this death has not expelled Irene's greatest fears that haunt her. The stability and the security still remain out of her reach. Like Helga's fate in *Quicksand*, Irene is bleaker than death for she must continue living.

Judith Butler reads *Passing* as a theorization of desire, displacement and jealous rage (182). For Judith Butler, Larsen's final implication of Irene in Clare's death seems to suggest the need to destroy the source of difference that would have exposed her in the public sphere. "the passion for Clare had to be destroyed only because she could not find a place for her own sexuality to live" (*The bodies that matter*, 185).

4. Conclusion

Larsen's marginal identity as a mulatto novelist had made her wrestle with misunderstanding. She fought to fit in a world where she could belong but never found. Her fame did not last long, soon she was forgotten because she challenged traditions of silence and shame, Larsen has come to be viewed as a border figure, a homeless, shifting in and out of social spaces without really belonging to none of them. She was named sick, insane, wrong, and a liar because she did not conform to the prescription made by the community. Even after Larsen's reemergence onto the literary scene in 1970, her nature has changed along with the needs of the community discourse (feminism and multiculturalism). Today, many critics consider her to be the greatest novelist of the Harlem Renaissance and her works continue to be read all over the world's universities.

Nevertheless, Larsen owes her fame to *Quicksand* and *Passing*. In 2007, these novels have been the subjects of hundreds of scholarly articles and dissertations that offer a range of critical interpretations challenging marriage, middle class domesticity, interrogating gender, race and sexual identity and using traditional figures of speech. Both, *Quicksand* and *Passing*, represent race, class, gender and sexuality. They center the lives of African American women and their place in society facing the challenges of being both mixed-race and women.

Chapter II

Anzia Yeziarska a Hybrid Cultural Identity

1. Introduction

Although Anzia Yeziarska's novels and short stories were considered as autobiographical, her tales depict the insider of the Jewish tenements of Hester streets, named "The mouthpiece of New York's Jewish East Side". By literary critic William Lyon Phelps (quoted in Ferraro 53). Frank Crane quoted in Henriksen (149). "Yeziarska dipped her pen in her heart and wrote the stories of her immigrant people". Other critics detailed upon her lack of restraint, her defiance of literary conventions, her over emotionalism, and honesty with no artistry in her tales. Her works are rather valued for the insight they offer into the mysterious and exotic world of the Jewish immigrant, Yeziarska was called "the Sweatshop Cinderella" in newspapers and popular magazines. (qtd in Henriksen 149) Her pursue of successes has celebrated The American Dream rather than defamating it as found in her works. In short, Yeziarska incarnated the "American Dream", thanks to what she has written about the East European Jewish immigrant life, on the Lower East side.

Anzia Yeziarska grew up in the United States in poverty in a working class family, she became a famous author and participated in social movements of the early decades of the 20th century. Her famous novel, *Bread Givers*, published in 1920, was a fictionalized autobiography that detailed her growing dissatisfaction with the traditional role of women in the society. Yeziarska turned the frustration and indignities she suffered in New York's tenements, into novels and short stories that depicted the lives of Jewish immigrants who are subjected to discrimination, culture shock, and poverty. Adam Smith defined poverty as the inability to purchase necessities required by nature, thus, this poverty had been viewed by the structural stratification theories as the result of social isolation and the effects of residential segregation of Jewish and African Americans in inner-cities, racism and lack of access to human and social capital. All these make poverty persist. (Harrington 1962).

As an American Jewish woman, Yeziarska's writings reflect historical trends in American Jewish life, and the changing issues facing Yeziarska who works to position herself as an American, a Jew, and a woman. Born in the Russian-Polish village, Plinsk, near Warsaw, between 1880 and 1885, the youngest of nine children, Yeziarska arrived in the United States with her family to New York's lower East side of Manhattan. Her family assumed the surname Mayer, while she took Harriet (Hattie) as her first name, then reclaimed her original name, Anzia Yeziarska, in her late twenties. Her father, Baruch (Bernard) is a Talmudic scholar who engaged in full-time study of Torah and sacred books. Yeziarska's parents encouraged her brothers to pursue a higher education, meanwhile, she and her sisters are forced to help their struggling family, whose culture did not legitimate the educational aspirations of girls. Yeziarska attended elementary school for two years, then she worked at many domestic and factory jobs, while one of her brothers studied chemistry, another became a high school maths' teacher and another an army colonel. (Henrikson. *Writer's Life*)

As a young girl, Yeziarska clashed frequently with her father whose poverty, religious convictions, and Eastern European education prevented his daughter from integrating the American life. All this had made Yeziarska leave her parents' home and moved into a home for working girls, where she pursued her ambition for education with determination. She managed to enroll Columbia University's teachers college while supporting herself by menial works. From 1908 to 1913, she taught elementary school attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Women's struggle and their resistance to the economic oppression, exploitation and gender discrimination, all remain the common points that associate feminist criticism to the Marxist one since both of them endeavour against capitalist's ideologies and principles "women's struggle is class struggle" Martha, R (2008).

In 1910, Yeziarska married Arnold Levitas, the father of her only child Louise born in 1912. Two years later, Yeziarska left her husband and moved with her daughter to San Francisco, where she worked as a social worker. Overwhelmed with the work and the responsibilities of raising her daughter, she gave up her maternal

rights and transferred her daughter to Levitas, and engaged in a romantic relationship with philosopher John Dewey, a professor at Columbia University. In 1913, she began to write fiction which focuses on Jewish immigrants' life, giving voice to her people. Her work features female protagonists and explores the transition from "Greenhorn" to American, the struggle against patriarchy, poverty, and Jewish practice. It also depicts the striving for acceptance, prosperity, and freedom in the new world, paying particular attention to the hardships of poverty for women who are financially dependent on their husbands. Yeziarska rejected her father's Orthodox way of life and opinions, however, she loved the cadences of the Bible and believed in God, replacing Judaism with faith in the intellect.

Yeziarska published, in 1915, *Free Vacation House* that exposes the humiliation, inflicted on poor women, by well-intentioned charitable organization, based on Yeziarska's sister Helena's experience, the story is about "Free Country House" for poor mothers and their children which is so rule-bound. In a word, it is as a prison, where social workers ask intimate questions in public. After that, Yeziarska published *Where Lovers Dream* and *The Fat of the Land* that is considered as the best collection of short stories of 1919. She was brought to fame and fortune by *Hungry Hearts* in 1920, when Samuel Goldwyn based a silent movie on it. *Children of Loneliness* is another collection of short stories, written in 1922, that focused on the children of immigrants and their pursuit of "the American Dream".

In 1923, *Salom of the Tenements* was inspired by her friend, Rose Pastor Stokes, who gained fame as a young immigrant woman when she married a wealthy young man of a prominent New York family in 1904. *Bread Givers* is Yeziarska's most studied work, it was written in 1925, and it explores the life of a young Jewish-American immigrant woman struggling to live from day to day, while searching to find her place in the American society. This novel had earned Yeziarska critical acclaim and respect as a mature writer, it remains her best known novel. *Arrogant Beggar* chronicles the adventures of Adele Linder, it exposes the hypocrisy of charitably run Hellman Home, for working girls after they flee from the poverty of the

Lower East Side. In (1929-1930), Yeziarska received a “Zona Gale” fellowship at the University of Wisconsin, which gave her a regular salary. (Henrikson)

In 1932, Yeziarska published *All I Could Never Be*, inspired from her romantic relationship with John Dewey who was her great romance, despite the difference in their ages, he was fifty eight and she was in her mid-thirties. Yeziarska used in her writing his poems and phrases from the letters he sent to her, as portrayed in her book. She identified as an immigrant and never felt truly American, believing that nature-born people had an easier time, *All I Could Never Be* was the last novel published before Yeziarska fell into obscurity. *Red Ribbon on White Horse* was written in 1950, when Yeziarska was nearly 70 years old, this revived interest in her work as did the tendency in 1960 and 1970 to study literature by women. One of Yeziarska’s bleakest stories was *The Open Cage* that she wrote during her late years of life. She started writing it in 1962 at the age of 81, and it compares the life of an old woman to that of an ailing bird. Although she was nearly blind, Anzia Continued writing stories, articles until her death in California in 1970. (Levitas, Louise. Anzia Yeziarska)

2. Immigrant Jewish Identity and the Female Voice

Anzia Yeziarska wrote to help her people, as her daughter Louise said, she wrote from the bottom of her heart. She wanted to give a voice to the muteness of her people, who found it difficult to integrate the American society. She manages to forge a new identity without losing her Jewish one, she is the East European women’s voice. That voice is the legacy Yeziarska leaves to the next generation of Jewish American female writers, such as Grace Paley whose stories contain elements of her personal history just like Yeziarska, when she uses her very particular language that traces back a polyglot family tradition. Yeziarska’s immigrant parents and relatives spoke Russian, Yiddish, and English, that is why she uses Yiddish-English to convey a distinct voice from the Jewish-American immigrant community, and enhance her depiction of her characters’ ghetto life with her voice that contains a vibrant high pitched emotionalism

and euphoria even when she depicts the struggle of her female characters against poverty and patriarchy.

This narrative voice owes much to the language of the ghetto women's speech, a style that differs from the men's one, the emotional verbal style of Yiddish-speaking or dialect speaking ghetto women, in writing her stories. In particular, Yeziarska uses illiterate women's story-telling that is called grandmother's tales depicting the Russian Jewish women's experience and working class struggle. Thomas J Ferraro points out of Yeziarska that :“in portraying her own people, her duty was to update the project of realism by investigating the reciprocal reshaping between Eastern European folk Judaism and the structures of opportunity in the 20th century America.” (Ferraro 532). By the time, Grace Paley achieved what Yeziarska had started and that project of assimilation continues, Paley's women characters are daughters of the generation Yeziarska wrote about but they are freer, though oppression and injustice remain in America. This shows the writer's optimism and belief in change that make them put their Jewishness and womanhood aside, and integrate the American society successfully without forgetting their origins. Julia Kristiva said about these writers: “their voices embody jouissance in their triumph over what Paley has called “the dark lives of women.” (Hulley27).

Through her writings, Yeziarska empowers immigrant Jewish women to live a real life and create their own identity which is both American and Jewish. Yeziarska's women endlessly talk, argue, assert, and complain using a Yeddish-American language (vernacular). In her story, *The Fat of the Land*, she shows the protagonist, Hanneh Breineh, as a woman so traumatized by poverty that she cannot love her children, she does not stop from complaining about her life, especially about the many children she must feed and care of. “woe to me”, sobbes Hannah Breineh. “to my bitter life there ain't no end”, she curses her children calling them glutton, blood suckers, savages, and brats. She also recognizes herself as a mother who had to be hard hearted in her daily struggle with hunger, dirt, prejudice, and learning a new language. Overwhelmed with work, Yeziarska herself gave up her maternal rights and transferred her daughter to her husband.

To give voices to these women, and to preserve their English-Yiddish speech, means to bear witness to the cruelties their lives that include loss of their mother tongue, their mother country, and their children's love, Yeziarska writes of her work, "I am sure of this, that the utterance of the ignorant like me is something like utterance of the dying. It's mixed up with incoherent, but it has the last breath of life and death". (The Collection of short Stories of Anzia Yeziarska). While Yeziarska's previous works explore the struggle of these alienated, submitted, and wondering women, *Bread Givers* depicts another kind of women but this time, the female characters have more consideration. The new generation or what we call the daughters of the immigrant Jewish mothers are more rebellious, they do not complain, they act, and they are defiant, disobedient, and unwilling to serve.

The protagonist of *Bread Givers*, Sara, is disappointed with her father, her sisters, her lover, and the death of her mother, she does not surrender, she must persevere, and she does not rely on anyone, "No father, no lover, no family, no friends. I must go on and go on. I must go on alone". Yet, despite their efforts to conform, America does not welcome them with open arms. The only way to break the rules and make them *escape* from the taboo of remaining under their parents' roof until marriage is education. This will turn these alienated new generation of Jewish females into someone that America will recognize and respect, so, in order to achieve this recognition and for a better assimilation and integration, German Jewish, who are already established and better accepted in America wanted to defend all Jews including new immigrants, against anti-Semitism, and the desire to assimilate them, had led to great deal of Jewish organizations like what happened with African-American organizations, so the English-language Jewish press like "the Chicago Defender", had published lists of dos and don'ts for immigrants including obeying the law and avoiding radicalism. (Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, troubling the water.)

Jewish agencies varied quickly combining self-help and political action to achieve their goals, Jewish women of middle-class and upper-class back-grounds formed the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) in 1893, to promote pride in Jewish identity and encourage greater integration into the American society. The

NCJW like black women's club, focused on benevolence to aid poor immigrants. It was the voice of all Jewish women that speaks for them, these voices have begun to correct the deficiency present in the immigrant Jewish society, these triumphs are America's triumphs. They do not only prove the determination of immigrant Jewish females, but more over the credit of American opportunities and its rightness with foreigners and Yeziarska is a vivid example of that.

After recounting the poverty, the cruel sweatshops and the old world oppression that marked her childhood, Yeziarska's courage and determination with the American opportunities that nursed her education, have made from her a distinctive writer. When Yeziarska had a chance to speak to the Americans through her writings, she claims for America the spirit of the courageous immigrant she is. She states in her introductory speech "when the editor told me that he would give me the chance to speak to the Americans out of my heart and say freely, not what I ought to feel -not what the Americans want me to feel- but what I actually do feel-something broke loose in me" (77). Yeziarska's pen has opened America's eyes on the necessity to see that its future lies on the immigrants who most deeply embody its founding principles for self determination, hard work and success.

Frank Crane, a popular syndicated newspaper wrote an article declaring the author the national authority on immigration in America "I got a new slaut on America from Anzia Yeziarska". And begins,

she walked into my office one day and brought the old world with her. She had not said three words before I saw farther into the heart of Russia and Poland than I had ever been able to do by reading many heavy books. She was Poland. [...] Here was a person. Here was an East Side Jewess that had struggled and suffered in desperate battle for life amid the swarms of New York. [...] From a sweatshop worker to a famous writer! All because she dipped her pen in her heart (quoted, in Henriksen 149).

After this article, Crane coined Yeziarska as the voice of American immigration, he put her high into the hands of Hollywood, the true-frame makers of the day. Yeziarska incarnates The American Dream as viewed by James Truslow Adams in "The Epic of America" stating "It is not a dream of motor cars and a high wages merly, but a dream

of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are unately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” published by scholarship @ western 2014. This implies that the success or failure of an individual depends only on his natural abilities or his lack of determination.

3. About *Bread Givers* and *The Fat of Land*

Anzia Yezierska has chronicled the hunger of her generation of newly landed Jewish Americans, her novels and short stories, vividly depict both the literal hunger of poverty and the metaphoric hunger for security, education, love, home, and meaning. In short, hunger for the American dream. She focuses in her writings on Jewish immigrants’ life and their daily struggle and triumphs. Her semi-autobiographical novel, *Bread Givers*, depicts a struggle between a father of the old world and a daughter of the new world. Labeled as the best known novel, *Bread Givers* received this sparkling review in New York “Times” on September 5th, 1925, “*Bread Givers* enables us to see our life more clearly to test its values, to reckon up what it is that our aims and achievements may mean, it has a raw, uncontrollable poetry and a powerful sweeping design.”

3.a. Dilemma in *Bread Givers*

The novel tackles the struggle of Jewish immigrants on New York’s Lower East Side, the Jewish women against family, religious constraints, and economic obstacles, to create their own independence. Sara Smolinsky, the protagonist is a young girl who lives in a poor neighborhood with her family who immigrates from Poland to America in hope of a better life living. They are very poor, their poverty could have been prevented if Sara’s father, a rabbi, has not devoted his days to preaching and reading the Torah telling his wife, a homemaker, “God will provide”, he has never contributed to his family’s income. Sara and her three sisters are the soul providers for the family’s

food, rent, clothing, and anything they need, they take all the burden of the family. The burden becomes heavier when Sara's sisters are forced to get married with husbands chosen by their tyrannic father pushing aside their hopes for a marriage of love, who takes profit from the wealthy dowry. Sara is forced to adapt her father's lifestyle that she does not like,

But now all the hammering hell that I had to listen to since I was born cracked my brain. His heartlessness to Mother, his pitiless driving away Bessie's only chance to love, bargaining away Fania [Sara's sister] to a gambler and Mashah [another sister] to a diamond-faker when they each had the luck to win lovers of their own, all these tyrannies crashed over me. Should I let him crush me as he crushed them? No. this is America, where children are people (135).

As she grows up, Sara is determined to make change in her condition, so she decides to face the obstacles that prevent her from being what she wants to be, an independent American woman, and the only path she must follow is going to college to better her life. Sara enrolls the local night school and begins studying to become a school teacher, while selling Herring in the morning to help in the house income, she leaves her parents and attends college where she earns a degree in education and obtains a job as a teacher in New York. There she rents a room, this is very significant for Sara, it is the first step for a new life, for independence. In (ch X) Sara states: "This door was life. It was air. The bottom starting-point of becoming a person, I simply must have this room with the shut door." (159) A private room is very important for Sara, it is the starting-point for achieving her goal, this room will help Sara shape her own identity far from her parents nagging about her single status, they want her to be married as her sisters as Reb Smolinsky, the father, states in (ch XV) "It says in the Torah, Breed and multiply. A woman's highest happiness is to be a man's wife, the mother of a man's children." (206).

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf argues that the male dominated the ideas of the patriarchal society by affording a room for the boy and not the girl preventing her from realizing her creativity and true potential. A woman who lacks a room cannot compete against a man who does not struggle for such basic necessity which implies that women are treated unequally in their society. Sara's room

symbolizes privacy, leisure time and financial independence. Sara is stronger than any preaching, she refuses Max Goldstein declaring that her existence is worth more than a man. “Don’t worry. I’ll even get married some day. But to marry myself to a man that’s a person, I must first make myself for a person”.(172) she wants to live a life she chooses, and not the one her father decides for her declaring that marriage will prevent her from reaching her aim of independence and education for which she is working so hard.

Sara learns that her mother whom she has not visit for six years, is dying, once at her bedside, the mother asks Sara to take care of her father after her death, but Reb Smolinsky quickly gets remarried to their widow neighbor which offended deeply Reb’s daughters, Mrs. Feinstein tries to extort money from her stepchildren. Sara falls in love with Hugo Seelig which marks the end of Sara’s loneliness and brings happiness and joy in her gloomy life, she is attracted to Hugo because of his kindness and humanity, unlike her father who is selfish and set himself above the rest of his family. Hugo respects Sara, he vents her merits and her intelligence, he understands her in a way no man has never done including her father.

Poverty has made Sara’s father escaping his new wife by moving in with Hugo and Sara. Despite her efforts to be independent and away from her father’s grasp, Sara finds herself sacrificing the many gains she had made for herself. Her tyrannic father has become lonely and old and despite her reluctance to take him under her roof. She knows that this is what she has been taught, serving the elders, particularly male elders, brings blessing into the young people’s lives. Sara’s life has come full circle, she returns to the starting point, living with her father under the same roof! “I felt the shadow still there, over me. I wasn’t just my father, but the generation who made my father whose weight was still on me.” (297).

3.b. Living on *The Fat of the Land*

The Fat of the Land is the story of a mother and her children divided by two cultures, the protagonist, Hanneh Breineh, the mother comes to live with her family in the United States and keeps her own culture, the Polish one, whereas her children,

Abe, Jake, Fanny, Benny, and Sammy change from rags to riches, and adopt the American values and lifestyle after they grow up. The second main character is Mrs. Pelz, Hanneh's neighbor and best friend. The first chapter shows how Hanneh struggles in extreme poverty to raise up her children. This short story deals with the immigrants' Jewish struggle with daily life poverty and their attempts to integrate the wealthy American society and how their life is changing from the extreme of poverty to the excess wealth. It also depicts the irony of being found in the extremes of both, poverty and wealth.

On the other hand, it shows a society where children grow up to be embarrassed by their parents "I have tried harder than all of you to do my duty. I've lived with her" (101).

I have to go with her everywhere while you buy her presents and holidays. God knows how hard I have tried to civilize her so I won't have a blush with shame when I take her anywhere.

I have dressed her in the finest Parisian clothes, but whenever she opens her mouth, all that comes out is the voice of a poor lady from Delancy Street (101).

Like in *Bread Givers*, *The Fat of the Land*, depicts the clash between the old generation and the new one, the price of success that the Jewish offspring must pay is the denial of their old world parents, these parents who have survived under difficult circumstances and had strove to ensure the survival of their families, have been removed by wealth and by a society that gives a higher value to social etiquette than it does to familial love and respect.

These children are Americanized and dehumanized "say, sis" (98) Benny called sharply, "haven't you told mother that she was going with us tonight?"(98), "I'll take her some other time" (99) snapped Fanny. "I don't care what you think! I can't appear with her in a box at the theatre. Can I introduce her to Mrs. Van Suyden? Any one will know we came from Delancy Street the minute we introduce her anywhere." (99). The protagonist of *The Fat of the Land* Hanneh Breineh who moves from the poor tenement-dwellers to the wealthy mansions, finds herself less free, she is bound by rules of a rigid social code that she does not understand, this has affected the relation between Hanneh and her daughter Fanny who adopts a high social standard, and

severed the mother-daughter bond of love and respect. Hanneh faces the dilemma of leaving her newly acquired social position and habits, realizing she cannot return to the degradation of poverty in the tenements where she faces loneliness and bewilderment, that woman who has traveled from rags to riches is suspended between two worlds.

Mrs. Pelz is Hanneh's neighbor who lends her washer-boiler to Hanneh whose boiler has not been properly fixed by a swindler who stole some cents that could help in the house hold,

Damm him, the robber, the way he fixed it. If you have no luck in this world, then it's better not to live. There I spent fifteen cents to stop one hole, and it runs out another. How I fought bargaining with him to get it down to fifteen cents! He wanted a quarter, the swindler, I curse him from the bottom of my bitter heart for every penny he took from me for nothing! (4).

Mrs. Pelz always helps her neighbor and gives her advice, she is kind and somehow philosophical. Much of the force of this story derives from the characters' speech, they use a richly idiomatic language that makes the reader imagine how does the character look like, as if it is real "you've got to watch those swindlers, or they steal the white out of your eyes" (4) warned Mrs. Pelz, "you should have tried out your boiler before you paid him. Wait a minute until I empty out my dirty clothes in a pillow case, then I hand it to you." (4).

The conversations are so spontaneous that the reader finds himself inside the scene watching what is happening and attracted to the idiomatic interaction between the two neighbors of the old world. Mrs. Pelz, as usual, tries to comfort Hanneh, telling her that these children who are seen as a burden for her will later provide more income to the house once they are old enough to work, saying: "Never mind. You will come out from troubles just as soon as your children get old enough to get their working papers, the more children you got, the more money you'll have." (23) But, Hanneh knows that the children once Americanized, they will deny the parents of the old world, as she answered: "why should I fool myself with false hope? Don't you know I have bad luck in this world? Do you think American children will give everything they earn to their mother?" (24)

The second part of the story deals with the turning-point of the Breineh's, after the accident death of Hanneh's husband on work, the family got five hundred dollars insurance that helps the widow lift in life and makes her open a small grocery store, then her son, Abe, married a girl with some money that starts him in business and makes him run a very big shirt factory in the country with more than five hundred workers. Whereas Benny, another son, becomes a successful playwright known everywhere, all Hanneh's children succeed in business and they buy a big house for their mother where she lives with her daughter, Fanny, who adopts the American values and considers her mother as a shame for the family because she, the mother, does not want to conform to the new standard of life her children are living now.

Mrs. Pelz comes to visit Hanneh in her new house for the first time, she is so amazed by Hanneh's life, the beautiful house she is living in, the silk clothes, and jewels she is wearing. After climbing the stairs, she was out of breath as she rang the bell with trembling fingers. (54), "Even the outside smells rich! Look at those curtains! and expensive shades in all the windows like millionaires! Twenty years ago she used to eat from the pot with her fingers, and now she lives in a palace" (54) this is what Mrs. Pelz was saying to herself when she was in front of Hanneh's home admiring it. Unfortunately, all this wealth never fully satisfied Hanneh, there is something missing, she lost the love of her socially ambitious children who want to get rid of her by removing her in one of her children's buildings for the elderly persons.

Hanneh will not find the need to cook because there, she will be taken care of, the new, Riverside apartment to which Hanneh was removed by her socially ambitious children, was for the habitually active mother, no better than a lonely prison. When they took away her kitchen, Hanneh Breinch felt robbed of the last reason for her existence. Cooking and shopping and cleaning her pots and pans gave her an excuse for living and struggling and putting up with her children. The lonely idleness of Riverside Drive, drove her to depression she felt cut off from life, from everything warm and human. The indifference of the look in the eyes of people around her was like slaps in the face.(108)

Hanneh's movement between poverty, symbolized in "Delancy Street", and the richness, symbolized in "River Side Drive" is ambiguous, she is neither inside nor outside. She is suspended between two worlds ignoring in which one she can fit.

The idea of removing Hanneh to the elderly building does not prevent her from trying to be herself, this is what has made her daughter furious again,

Mother you are ruining my life! Why do you think we got this apartment for you but to get rid of your fish smell and your fight with the servants! And here you come with a basket on your arm as if you just got off the boat Poland yesterday! When will you ever stop disgracing us? (120)

Hanneh feels alone and chained as a dog, she is not free to act the way she wants, she needs her children around her, she needs their love, their warmth, but these ungrateful children are too busy with "social etiquette". Fanny does not forget the old days, she still holds the grudge for her mum who used to curse them because she could not afford buying food, "you want me to still love you?" (124) rages the daughter. "you knocked every bit of love out of me when I was kid. All the memories of childhood I have is [sic] your everlasting cursing and yelling that we were eating too much" (124).

Hanneh escapes from her apartment and goes to Mrs. Pelz who thinks that her friend has no right to complain, she has fur, diamonds, and silk clothes, and she lives on *the fat of the land*. Mrs. Pelz envies Hanneh who has everything that Mrs. Pelz wishes "Hanneh Breineh"(130) said Mrs. Pelz, "you are sinning before God. Look at your fur coat. It alone would feed a whole family for a year. I never had a piece of fur trimming on a coat, and you are in fur from neck to feet, I never had a piece of feather on a hat, and your hat is all feathers" (130). Mrs. Pelz will never understand that money cannot bring happiness, it cannot bring back the children's love, and it cannot fill the gap of Hanneh's loneliness. Hanneh spends a whole day wondering in the streets, she knows that she cannot live her old poor life of Delancy Street, moreover, she is accustomed to the material comfort her children are providing her with. This once poor lady cries of being enslaved by wealth. She is resigned to live with her sorrow till the end of her life!

4. Conclusion

In all her novels, Yeziarska has depicted her own experience of acculturation, the centrality of the family, mainly patriarchy, all these themes are nicely presented in her Yiddish-English language to protect the natural forms of the setting and the themes, Yeziarska has dealt with. What she has written mirrors the very real life of the Jewish immigrants and their disillusionment about the American dream. The novels do not appeal to Jewish audience only but they touch all the communities, even the recent immigrants and refugees connect to *Bread Givers* that has prevailed after more than forty years of ignorance. Alice Kessler Harris has given life to *Bread Giver* that has made Yeziarska emerges after being forgotten for so many years. Thanks to her huge efforts, the historian Alice Kessler gave the opportunity to students of various backgrounds to be in touch with Yeziarska, the rebellious novelist, via her great works.

Chapter III

The Odyssey of Evelyn Scott

1. Introduction

Evelyn Scott, the novelist and essayist was amongst the few artists who were dedicated to the artistry of Modernism. She wanted to be world widely recognized. In an interview with Harry Salpter, Scott said,

I want to make my universe recognizable to others; I want to communicate my sense of what life is to me. I don't expect anyone to know what my universe is until I'm dead and it has been completed. One book can be only a partial attempt to create, or express, the universe. There is something in each of my books that makes it an integral part of the architecture of the whole and even if, at my death, a turret should be missing, you will be able to get an idea of the general design-at least I hope so. (286)

Evelyn Scott was born Elsie Dunn in Clarksville in Tennessee on 17th January 1893. She is the only child of aristocratic parents, Seely and Maude Thomas Dunn. She enrolled preparatory school, then Newcomb College and Tulane University. She was a rebellious teenager, and a boundary breaker. At the age of fifteen, she wrote a controversial letter to "the New Orleans Times Picayune", asking for the legalization of prostitution to control venereal disease.

At the age of 19, she turned her back to the genteel world she was born into, and run away with a married man, who was twice her age, Frederick Creighton Wellman, the dean of the school of tropical Medicine at Tulane. To hide their identities, the couple changed their names into Cyril and Evelyn Scott, they *escaped* to Brazil where Scott gave birth to her only son Creighton. After her arrival to Brazil, she was attended by a local doctor whose care made her suffer complications, this caused her health problems the rest of her life. The climax of Scott's anxiety was during the forties, when many problems faced her at once. Her husband had been called into active service, her mother was sick and she takes care of her.

Moreover, Scott's father denied her refusing any assistance, either emotionally or financially. She ended up with a stroke that made her hearing voices the rest of her life, coupled with "London Bombings" which created a kind of paranoia which put her in total isolation. "If nobody recognizes me, then it is a sign that I have ceased to exist" (53). Clients who lose family, friends and associated position and power are inclined to feelings of rejection, worthlessness and loss of self-esteem (Ravish, 1985).

In 1914, Evelyn Scott emerged as a writer, she published twenty books between 1920 and 1941, among them: two novels, two autobiographical works, two volumes of poetry, four children's books, one play and a number of short stories, and articles on communism. Her reputation as a major American writer is due to two important achievements: *Escapade*, the intriguing memoir, (1923) and *The wave*, an innovative Civil War novel. Her writing is of a southern intellectual woman who moved across the national and the international literary scene of the twenties and thirties, she participated in the most American intellectual life like the feminist movement, the anarchism, and the rise of literary communism.

When William Faulkner published *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929, his publisher told him that he would need critical support to advertise for his book, and that it should be submitted to a better known writer, and it was Evelyn Scott whose novel, *The wave*, had made her fame and placed her among the main literary figures of her time. The best thing that could be said about Faulkner's novel is that Evelyn Scott thought "it was good", a thing that placed the novice writer, William Faulkner, in company with Evelyn Scott. Ten years later, when the successful Faulkner was asked by an interviewer if he could name any good women writers, he said: "well, Evelyn Scott was pretty good for a woman" (187) (Callard, pretty good for a woman). This, implicitly, means that as a well known writer, Faulkner does not care to keep company with female writer.

Scott's career was in decline and she, no longer, posed a threat. In 1919, the Scotts returned to the United States, due to Evelyn's health problems, and settled in Greenwich Village among the literary figures where Scott produced reviews and fictions. She made friends with many authors such as, the anarchist Emma Goldman,

the poet Lola Ridge, and the novelist Kay Boyle. The Scotts divorced in 1920, but remaining close friends and lived in the same house for another five years. Evelyn became involved with many affairs, with the critic Frank Waldo, the poet William Carlos, and the artist father of Thomas Merton. Cyril-Kay Scott stated in an autobiography that he published: “she had an unusually brilliant mind with which, had she been able to develop the character and emotional stability to match, she could have made herself a very famous woman”. (168) Key- Scott also declares: “had she treasured fewer personal caprices [she] possibly might have become our greatest American writer”

In 1923, Cyril and Creighton set up in Paris, Evelyn stayed in New York to finish her autobiographical account of her adventures in Brazil, *Escapade*. In 1925, She moved to London where she met John Metcalf, an author of English supernatural stories, whom she started dating and married later. At the height of her career, Scott traveled back and forth between England and New York, publishing so many books that had made of her the most important American author of her time. After the Second World War, Scott and John lived in England and as good things never last, she was quickly developing a mental problem that had increased her paranoia. After she had lost all her money and John’s in a rental property, she is defamed by her former husband, avoided by her only son Creighton, and breaking all contacts with her friends. Penniless, the couple returned to America with the financial help of some friends, Scott was skinny and toothless because of malnutrition and lack of resources for dental care, she spent the rest of her life in a shabby room of a cheap hotel with John, where she died in her sleep from a lung cancer in 1963. (Tyrrer, Patricia)

Evelyn is best known as a novelist whose work had broken the social norms and challenged the literary conventions, she has been recovered through the study of her works that deserve to be read. “what is real when it has been written does not have to be a masterpiece” Jertrude Stein (Geographical history of America) Though she was born into southern aristocracy, gaining literary fame among outstanding poets and artists, yet she is buried in an unmarked grave in Rose Hill cemetery in New Jersey. Loneliness and social isolation have affected Scott’s mental health and caused her

stress and paranoia which affected all aspects of her existence, this had caused her conflict with her close friends. “A person showing the following signs may be socially isolated: depression, mood disorder, inability to connect with others, refusal to leave the house and avoiding people, in addition to being anxious, nervous and keeping the door closed to lessen the ability of others to reach them” Lowenthal Marjorie Fiske 1964. “Social Isolation and Mental in Old Age”

2. Recovering a Lost Southern Identity Abroad

Southerners are regarded as distinct people who possessed their own values and way of life, because they were the descendents of the English aristocracy, while the northerners were the descendents of the 17th century English puritans. The southerners were stereotyped as sensitive to insult, conservative, and preoccupied with honor. The south was described as the land of aristocratic planters, beautiful southern belle, poor white thrash, and faithful slaves. They were known as being the proud aristocrats that exploited poor white, they owned slaves that live on plantations. White southern women were less emancipated than women in the north. Despite the image of southern belle, they suffered under heavier burdens, they married very young, bore many children, and most die earlier. They lived in isolation, did not have any women friends. Their education was brief so that they do not ask for independence. In short, women in the south were submitted under the male control. (Bach, Peggy)

The southern plantations provided the United States with a flourished economy and enormous wealth, it help finance the American economic growth before the Civil War that laid the basis for America’s industrial revolution in early nineteenth century. Moreover, because the south is specialized in agricultural productions, the north provided services for southern states such as textile, food processing industries, and commercial facilities. Then comes the Civil War that was the most destructive conflict in the western world between 1860 and 1865 which ended with the victory of the northern states ending slavery in the southern states and preserving the United States as one nation. Dissatisfied with the outcome of the Civil War, southerners had lost

their lands and migrated to other countries to build a new life for themselves establishing a new homeland and preserving important elements of their old south heritage.

These immigrants had also maintained their language and customs while contributing to South American's economy and society such as agriculture, teaching, and missionary activities. These displaced southerners like the confederados were driven by a strong desire to re-create the old south and developing a community that would allow them to see themselves as superior aristocratic slaveholders. Evelyn Scott's works *Migrations* and *Escapade* can demonstrate the efforts provided by the southerners to re-construct the south, its values and institutions outside of the geographical space of the American south, where they can recover their southern identity and social status that distinguish them from the inferior natives. (Bach, Peggy)

3. About *Migrations* and *Escapade*

Scott's memoir *Escapade* (1923) and the novel *Migrations* (1927), describe the odyssey of southerners who flee the American south to find themselves disoriented and displaced, attempting to reconstruct their south and its values outside America where they live. In these novels, Scott relates her own experience, fictionalizing her own story by changing names of the people involved. There are similarities between Thomas and Melinda George, the characters of *Migrations*, and Evelyn and Cyril Scott's own story. Both couples have departed from the Tennessee through Panama. Elsie (Evelyn) finds herself pregnant and gets sick on the ship just like Melinda. The most common point in both stories is the focus on southern characters traveling abroad and attempting to preserve their social structure and the status that they hold, aristocratic southerners. In short, a harsh struggle to implement values of the south in the new world where they live. (Welker, Robert)

3.a. Narrating a Controversial Life in *Escapade*

Scott's memoir, *Escapade* portrays her own story, in 1914, at the age of twenty, Elsie Dunn ran away with a much older married man, Frederick Wellman, they crossed on a ship to Brazil. In her account, Scott changed their real names and gave her characters new ones, Wellman becomes John, her mother who joins them later becomes Nannette, Creighton, her son is Jackie. Scott's life was the raw material by which she narrated the events that made her *escape* with John. She cannot bear the society's interference and outrage, when hearing about her adulterous relationship. It is her life, she does not care of the norms and manners, and she no longer wants to be a part of this society that prevents her acting the way she wants. She creates her own identity, she is a rebellious, "But I am in rebellion against all those people who make the laws, who edit the newspapers, who, without once inquiring into the personal elements which distinguish every situation, condemn in advance all those who fail in a conformity which has no individual significance" (17).

Scott rejects her society's codes and begins to search for another identity much different from the southern one. She claims: "I think I have given up questioning life, trying to find pattern into which I can fit myself" (15) and pronounces herself "satisfied with the vagueness" (15). In Brazil, the Scotts encounter some southerners who attempt to recover their southern identity as "Southern Aristocrats". They refuse to adapt the new situation they are living in, like Mrs. Beach, the racist southerner wife of the doctor who treats Scott after the birth of her child. The doctor apologizes to Scott because of the hospital's state which lacks the norms of treating "white people", after proclaiming herself as a southerner. This proclamation depressed Scott who *escapes* that kind of attitude. Scott's mother, Nannette, is also struggling to adapt to Brazil, she is convinced of being southern lady and superior to the natives, she pronounces that "they have no culture, no literature of importance" (82). Nannette always asserts her aristocratic status, she "always wears the same old Panama hat with a ribbon tied under her chin" (190). This causes laughter in Brazilians who call her "the old one" (190).

Scott had fled the southern norms just to find herself adopting them while facing difficult situations. When she takes her child to a charity clinic, she finds herself waiting among native ailing women and children. Getting bored from waiting for more than one hour, “My irritation against my surroundings intoxicated me with egotism.” (155) Scott confronts an intern berating him for the “disgraceful” way she has been treated. Explaining that she “was a person accustomed to receiving courtesy” (155), and assuming that she must be “a very great lady” (155), she succeeded to see the doctor when an intern “went immediately to find a doctor for me, and he succeeded” (155). Scott is afraid of becoming just like the other native women. Asserting her superiority makes her avoid waiting hours and hours for a doctor. Scott herself admits that her *escapade* from the southern social codes has failed because she is not brave enough to abandon her southern identity and its privilege.

In the last part of *Escapade*, Scott narrates how John attempts to cultivate an image for the family as being wealthy by buying six hundred acres of land, hiring black workers and growing manioc and raising sheep (168). John also tells lies about the wealth of Scott and her family which makes Scott comfortable. “John says that he is telling everyone that my father is rich, so that these people will respect me, so that if any harm comes to him I may find assistance in getting Jackie, Naneette, and myself back to the coast.” (191). Scott does not oppose her husband’s lies in which she fits perfectly, she cannot live without the privilege of her southern identity.

3.b. In Search of Identity with *Migrations*

Scott’s novel, *Migrations* depicts the disorientation and the displacement of southern characters outside the south in early 1850, where they attempt to reconstruct their culture and recover the identity that they possessed in America and have lost when they arrive in their new setting. *Migrations* is divided into three chapters, no plot or narratives are relating them, other than the theme. Chapter I and III describe slaveholders and slaves in Tennessee where a slave runs away and has been chased by mob justice who fight with a suspected abolitionist and his mixed-race wife. Chapter II

is longer, it traces a southern married couple's journey, via Jamaica and Panama, who leave Tennessee in search of better opportunities.

The setting is a fictional Tennessee town of Mims in early 1850s. Scott's account of Thomas and Melinda George is based on her family history, the story of her great aunt and uncle, whose journey becomes the central plot. The beginning of the novel depicts how life for the slaves at the Georges is. The slave Silas grew up as a friend to Thomas, he marries another slave, Fanny. When he discovered that Fanny is already pregnant by Thomas father, their master, he decides to leave her. Fanny suffers a lot then is sold by Thomas brother to pay for his own marriage. Thomas, a doctor, decides to go to California to try his chance as a physician. The couple, Thomas and Melinda, travels by ship from Virginia, stop for a while in Jamaica before they land in Panama where they ride mules and arrive to Panama City and board another ship to San Francisco.

This trip is hard for the couple who has never been outside the country before. Moreover, Melinda is pregnant and is often sick, the couple feels alienated in the world that surrounds them, a world without any social structure, it is very different from their south that they have left behind them. Once away from the south, the Georges' class status has been erased during this journey since they find themselves traveling with people to whom they feel superior. When they arrive in the hotel in Panama, men are sleeping in one room whereas women and children in another without taking class into consideration. Melinda is forced to accept this situation, she and Thomas "must make up their minds to mingle with low company" (144). But to the other travelers, the Georges are another couple looking for the American Dream, like them. Mrs. Grainer, "a poor white" woman states about California that it is "God's country" where "anybody can come poor and anybody can get rich" saying that California is a place that "ain't set with rules" and where "there is no better and no worse, and no need for anybody to be ashamed before anybody" (145).

The Georges try implicitly to avoid their fellow travelers or get close to them, for example through the jungle of Panama "Thomas and his wife kept a little apart from the others" (167). Melinda is trying hard to secure her identity and social class status

against the changes occurring during her journey in both, her physical appearance and her class position. However, she reassures herself, “we cannot starve, or descend ourselves in the social scale until we are nobody at all. After all Thomas is a southerner and a gentleman” (182). The concluding section of the novel takes us back to Tennessee where mob justice pursue Bosh, a slave, who has been caught looking through a white woman’s window. The mob confront Gilbert a white man who tries to protect Bosh, whose wife is suspected to be a mixed-race, “a nigger wife” (301). Gilbert and his wife were forced to flee the town. The mob lynched Bosh and his mother who tried to help him.

Melinda and Thomas finally arrive in San Francisco, they are welcomed by a group “Vigilantes” who examine the passengers, and prevent any undesirables from disembarking. This is a relief for Melinda and Georges who are going to restore their social identity which was threatened during their journey. Finally, the southern couple encounter a system that resemble to their old south, they have found a new south faraway, they have recovered their identity and their status in California. *Migration: An Arabesque in Histories*. New York: boni, 1927.

4. Conclusion

Evelyn Scott was one of the great American authors of the twentieth century, she started submitting poetry to “New York” magazine where she was known as the mystery woman of Brazil, and this nickname did not remain for long because she becomes one of the literary lights of 1920s and 1930s. In her work, Scott addressed a wide future audience who admired her work that is intertwined with her personal history as a novelist and her southern history. *Escapade* and *Migrations* convey Scott’s harsh reflection of the social norms that govern the role of women in Tennessee, while the males are concerned with their own existence fitting in the comfortable patriarchal society they have imposed over their submitted females. These reflections were the seeds that gave birth to her artistic life.

Crowds, crowds and the babel of voices. Let men, rushing after themselves, trample between my

breasts. I will slip away into passive stillness. Because I am utterly abandoned to life I believe I cannot be taken. When there is a kiss upon my mouth there is a colder kiss upon my heart. I feel wide like a field, sown with the seeds of pain. I bloom unseen to myself. And I wonder if all these emotions are utterly absurd. (41)

Living in a society that does not comprehend her artistry and where she cannot fully participate, Scott was defamed by her contemporary critics and male writers. One of these critics said,

Lock that damn woman up in a mental institution. How dare she write about the body or her emotions? How dare she write about childbirth in anything other than sanctified terms? For God's sake, we need at least some references to the Virgin Mary when talking about having a baby. (If only all women could be both virgins and mothers!). I don't want to hear that! It hurts. Now shut up, put down that damn pen and make me a cup of tea!

As a female writer that has no consideration to the social norms, for her depiction of the female body and the child birth in *Escapade*, Scott declares herself to be free and independent. She critically examines the modern woman who, regardless of her intelligence and abilities, cannot escape being regarded as a sexual object "she cannot avoid the invasive, furtive glances of men on the streets to make her uncomfortable." (223) What Scott had written became familiar to the modernists and the readers of our age, thanks to the rise of identity politics that gave birth to the feminist literary criticism. These literary movements gave a language to make Scott's difficult texts easy to understand. That easiness was not available for Scott's readers of the early nineteenth century.

General Conclusion

Larsen, Yeziarska and Scott are a sample taken from a huge number of American female writers whose works were dismissed to the ground and were penned as inauthentic and immoral. Yet, these socially and economically marginalized writers sought to articulate their resistance to the society norms made by Anglo-American males who prevented them from expressing their consternation and helplessness towards their oppressors. These writers stood out to remind their readers that in love, marriage, work, and religion, there is no place for them and they were not happy about it. At that time, women were powerless and lacked an organizing body that could represent them. Many women were bound with social norms such as religious beliefs and practices. Larsen, Yeziarska and Scott were among those who possessed an iron will, they defied all expectations and broke all boundaries, they continued writing and sending messages to women all over the world. They have introduced their readers to formerly taboo subjects such as depicting childbirth, woman's body, adultery and homosexuality.

When they write a kind of "serious literature" they were told that this kind of writing was of the male concern only and does not suit females and when they write about home and domesticity, they were told that their subject is unimportant and unworthy and their writing is dismissed. They are constantly reminded of being "females", "the other", or "the outsider" in the literary tradition. In fact, there was more than female eccentricity that led to the elimination of the work of all women modernists from the literary canon, it was the fear of artistic competition by males. These literary foremothers' works preceded that of the males who had reacted with both fear and jealousy, the letter of Nathaniel Hawthorne is the best example we can give to support our analysis: Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a letter to his publisher in response to the overwhelming success of female writers at that time, like Harriet Beacher Stow after *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* success. "America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash- and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed." (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1855)

Having genuinely appreciated Susan Warner's novel *The Wide, Wide World* (1849) for its stylistic innovations. Hawthorne goes on to say: "this woman writes as if the devil was in her; and that is the only condition under which a woman ever writes anything worth reading...Generally, women write like emasculated man, and are only distinguished from male authors by greater feebleness and folly". (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1855). This anecdote appears in Philip Gura's book *Truth's Ragged Edge: The Rise of the American Novel*. Harvard University. Since late 20th century, Larsen, Yeziarska and Scott's works which were penned as ambiguous, immoral and rebellious by their contemporaries of the 19th century, have prevailed and received renewed attention from scholars because of their depiction of racial, sexual and social issues and have achieved canonical status in many American universities, a thing that was previously impossible to accept and categorize.

These heroines merit our respect for they represent the sparkle that had given the bang to the emergence of the feminist movement which helped a lot in their own recovery as lost American women writers, and their contribution in enriching our literary heritage. The feminist critics of the 1970s supported these female writers work and praised it. As for Larsen, she became among the elites of the Harlem Renaissance writers because she gave a voice to black women. Yeziarska, who was dismissed for her critics to the traditional Jewish society, earned her recognition among the best Jewish literary figures. Evelyn Scott who was described as mad and a failure, became the founding mother of the modernist movement thanks to the formerly controversial subjects she tackled in her novels. Larsen, Yeziarska and Scott have set from obscurity to a fame that gradually faded and reflowered once more.

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