CHAPTER – 4

Decolonizing the Body: Maternity as Strategic Resistance

A detailed feminist reading of the five select fictional works also demonstrates how these fictional narratives open up immense scope for a feminist political act, that of “decolonizing the body,” an attempt to free woman’s body, mother’s body, from the restricting and exploitative chains of slavedom in patriarchy. Before proceeding to analyse how these five fictional works accomplish this act of “decolonizing the body,” it is necessary to begin with an understanding of Foucault’s notion of power and bodies. By emphasizing issues of power, Foucault extends his concerns with the means through which institutions like patriarchy produce strategic methods of control to induce docility in the social body and exert specific forms of power over human body. Foucault's works have been influential in the feminist understanding of patriarchy as a colonial model of domination and subordination, creating hegemony and causing resistance.

In Foucauldian view, the relations of power do not merely involve a static disparity between those who rule and those who are ruled in an assortment of institutional settings like patriarchy or a phallocentric social order. It is from Foucault’s notion of power and bodies that we conclude that beliefs about sexuality do not necessarily
produce decisive and unchangeable inequalities between groups of individuals, men and women. This creates the wonderful possibility to turn the working of an institution like patriarchy upside down, to terminate the colonial structures staying alive in a phallocentric universe. In Foucault’s view of power, it is possible to grasp exceptionally complex reconfigurations of dominance and subordination when we explore the interfaces between the multiple coordinates of power. Such a model has a distinct advantage over the one that appeals to the vertical binary of an inert “top-down” hierarchy neatly split between mastery (men) and subordination (women) in patriarchy.

Foucault devotes a great part of his inquiry to explain why the forms of power that he analysed are certainly not founded on a top-down model of subjection where law – either in cultural or statist forms – always succeeds in imposing authority from above. Instead, in Foucauldian view, “power” is a distinct relation that produces “resistance” at the same moment as it exerts force. Foucault’s distinctive perspective on “power” throws light on the ways in which “discourse” can not only be an instrument and an effect of power but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, giving rise to resistance and a starting-point for an opposing strategy. This Foucauldian notion of power explains how patriarchy as a discourse has finally given rise to resistance and thereby, paradoxically, prepared the ground for the
emergence of maternity discourses. Thus, Foucault’s contention that power can be refracted through discourse, showing how it is not always burdened by a repressive sovereign law, constitutes his concept of “reverse” discourse. According to feminists, this Foucauldian suggestion actually hints at a possibility for patriarchy to be overthrown.

The patriarchal discourse favouring pyramidal/hierarchical binary power structures (Master/slave, Colonizer/colonized, Man/woman) simply duplicates the most bleakly unequal power structures experienced in the everyday world. According to Foucault, such binary power differences turn against themselves by allowing participants in this “strategic game” to take control of the erotic charge factored into domination and subordination. Thus, by seeing patriarchy as a “game” with agreed rules, in such a strategic system the “slave” (woman) is not really a slave and the “master” (man) not really a master and this goes against how the system would like to interpret itself. Therefore, Foucault’s research into sexuality, the concept of power and bodies and so on exposes the inauthenticity and instability of institutions like patriarchy and certainly forms the basis for the distinctly feminist theoretical standpoint arrived at with the works of feminist critics like Gayle Rubin, Susan Brownmiller and so on: “decolonizing the body.”

Acknowledging Foucault’s contribution, Rubin attempts to identify, describe, explain and speak against sexual injustice and sexual
oppression in a system like patriarchy. Trained as an anthropologist, Rubin has been interested in how each society constructs its own sex/gender system: a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be (Reiter 165). One of the important points put forward by Rubin is to show how a double standard operates when Western culture accords privilege to patriarchal marital or familial relations legally sanctioned by marriage. Rubin insists that patriarchy does not offer a static model of how the West establishes its moral attitudes towards family, sexuality, marriage, parenthood and so on. Rubin believes that this zone of a double standard, the contested zone in the middle, indicates how the moral values attached to sexuality, parenthood, family, marriage and so on are gradually shifting. In other words, in opposition to the static model of patriarchy, the double standard which Rubin speaks about in turn generates a productive space where even a “single” parent status of the Woman-Mother is finally accepted within a system like patriarchy. Rubin’s notions, thus, run parallel to Foucault’s concepts of power and reverse discourse.

Rubin investigates how and why patriarchy persists in stigmatizing everything or any force that functions against the oppressive system. In a wide-ranging theoretical and cross-cultural
analysis, Rubin argues that every known society has what she calls “a sex/gender system.” As hunger may be satisfied by any number of different kinds of food, each of them “culturally defined and obtained,” sex in any given society is also regulated through the culturally dominant codes that condition the behaviour acceptable in men and women. But, as Rubin argues, these codes police not only “the social relations of sexuality” but also determine the social division between the sexes, the basis on which men and women are placed into “mutually exclusive categories.” Rubin points to the arbitrariness inherent in such classificatory logics which, in her view, forms the basis for a colonial structure like patriarchy. Rubin insists that:

Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else – for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. The idea that men and women are more different from one another than either is from anything else must come from somewhere other than nature . . . Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression . . . (Reiter 179-80)
In this view, the goal of Rubin’s works, in general, is not only the unmasking of a restrictive and fundamentally flawed conception of nature perpetuated by the patriarchal colonial structures but also the liberation of a true and more genuinely natural human diversity from the chains of social convention. By clearing away these arbitrary and artificial cultural obstacles, Rubin argues that it would be even possible to imagine the overthrow of patriarchy itself. This prospect implicit in Rubin’s argument finally finds expression in the feminist political act of “decolonizing the body.”

Rubin points out that in patriarchy men have certain rights in their female kin, whereas women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin: women may be used as bride wealth, trophies, gifts and even “traded, bought and sold” (Reiter 175-76). Following Rubin’s notions, we may conclude that all cultural constructs in patriarchy are, in fact, the colonial structures or categories which prescribe ways of describing and understanding human bodies and human relationships which in turn favour the political strategies of patriarchy. Patriarchy, therefore, is a system that keeps woman as a forbidden secret, denying all her right to her body and her emotions. Patriarchy encapsulates a pervasive and persistent kind of common sense about gender and sexuality: only men can be active sexual subjects, while the role of women is to be passive objects of male desire.
This patriarchal common sense has negative consequences for women: it restricts their freedom to behave as actively desiring subjects themselves on the one hand and makes them vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse by men who treat them as mere objects rather than equal human subjects on the other. To phrase it in simple terms, women are not in the position of having the sex they want, but frequently forced to have the sex that they do not want. Patriarchy is thus the colonialist space where “man” is the “subject” and “woman” the “object.” This patriarchal treatment of “woman” as the “object,” as the silenced or colonized passive, strategically involves an act of deliberately denying her the status of a human entity.

Patriarchy is, thus, a colonialist space in which even the nature, the materiality, of female bodies is constructed against their will. Hence, the body of woman, in its true sense, and its real experiences are buried or repressed in an oppressive social system like patriarchy, thereby forcing her to occupy the space of the “colonized.” In other words, patriarchy constructs women, mothers, against their will. This is, in fact, a notion discussed by feminist critics like Susan Brownmiller. Brownmiller traces the history, politics and sociology of rape, exposing the inherent and ingrained inequality of men and women under the patriarchal law. Fact by fact, Brownmiller pulls back the centuries of damaging lies and misrepresentations to reveal how rape still continues
to profoundly affect women’s lives today. In Brownmiller’s view, “rape” still continues as the most effective means to colonize women in patriarchy. As she argues, rape has become not only a male prerogative, but man’s basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggles, has become the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood. Man’s discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear in women must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe (Brownmiller 14-15). Thus, from prehistoric times to the present, according to Brownmiller, rape has played a critical function in perpetuating the colonialist space of patriarchy. Rape is, therefore, a conscious, deliberate process of intimidation by which men keep women in a state of fear. Moreover, according to Brownmiller, patriarchy views rape as a “property crime” of man against man. Brownmiller observes:

A female definition of rape can be contained in a single sentence. If a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is a criminal act of rape. Through no fault of woman, this is not and never has been the legal
definition. The ancient patriarchs who came together to write their early covenants had used the rape of women to forge their own male power---how then could they see rape as a crime of man against woman? Women were wholly owned subsidiaries and not independent beings. Rape could not be envisioned as a matter of female consent or refusal; nor could a definition acceptable to males be based on a male-female understanding of a female’s right to her bodily integrity. Rape entered the law through the back door . . . Woman, of course, was viewed as the property. (18)

Thus, according to Brownmiller, slavery, private property and the subjugation of women were facts of life, and the earliest written law of patriarchy that came down to us reflects this stratified life.

The written law of patriarchy in its origin was a solemn compact among men of property, designed to protect their own male interests by a civilized exchange of goods or silver in place of force wherever possible. As Brownmiller observes, in the primitive patriarchal models of tribal communities, even the capture of females remained perfectly acceptable with a payment of money. Her observation goes in agreement with the views of Rubin who spoke of the trade or traffic in women.
Brownmiller points out:

... rape, as a patriarchal father saw it, was a violation of the new way of doing business. It was, in a phrase, the theft of virginity, and embezzlement of his daughter’s fair price on the market. (18)

Thus, as Brownmiller points out, the patriarchal law in its beginnings defined rape as simply and conclusively the theft of a “father’s daughter’s virginity,” a specialized crime that damaged valuable goods before they could reach the matrimonial market. However, the present legal perceptions of rape are rooted still in ancient male concepts of property as all the dominant social orders across the globe perpetuate patriarchy (Brownmiller 376). According to Brownmiller, marriage for man was a great sexual convenience as well as a testament to his warring stature. She observes that once a man took title to a specific female body, he had to fight off all other potential attackers or scare them off by the retaliatory threat of raping their women. In this regard, Brownmiller argues:

... the price of woman’s protection by some men against an abuse by others was steep. Disappointed and disillusioned by the inherent female incapacity to protect, she became estranged in a very real sense from other females, a problem that haunts the social organization of
women to this very day. And those who did assume the historic burden of her protection – later formalized as husband, father, brother, clan – extracted more than a pound of flesh. They reduced her status to that of chattel . . . A crime committed against her body became a crime against the male estate. (17)

Thus, as Brownmiller points out, in patriarchy, man deliberately and tactfully assumes the protection of the “specific female body” to which he has taken title to as his own “historic patriarchal burden.”

As Brownmiller traces the history of rape in patriarchal culture, she observes that the earliest form of permanent, protective conjugal relationship, the accommodation called mating that was later changed to marriage, appears to have been institutionalized by the male’s forcible abduction and rape of the female (17). According to Brownmiller, whether in marriage or in the criminal violence called rape, a male took title to a female, staked a claim to her body, by an act of violence. In patriarchy, a forcible seizure always remains a perfectly acceptable way to men of acquiring women. In other words, it seems that man’s violent capture and rape of the female finally led to the full-blown male solidification of power called patriarchy. Woman as the first permanent acquisition of man, his first piece of real property, is the notion that forms the original building block, the cornerstone of the patriarchal law.
Man’s desire to maintain sole, total and complete control over woman’s body and mind sprang from his strategic need based on patriarchal law to be the sole physical instrument governing impregnation, progeny and inheritance rights. Thus, in patriarchy, man’s forcible extension of his boundaries to his mate and later to their offsprings marks the beginning of his concept of ownership. It is from this concept of ownership which equates the “right to woman’s body” with the “right to property” that man should be disillusioned from in order to overthrow an oppressive system like patriarchy.

Thus, by superimposing Foucauldian concepts with the views shared by feminists like Rubin and Brownmiller, we may derive the notion that, in patriarchy, rape can be of different kinds – physical, emotional, psychological – and that all rape is an exercise in power. In other words, “rape” in patriarchy involves not only an invasion or colonization of the woman’s body but also of her mind. To a woman the definition of rape is fairly simple – a sexual and psychological invasion of the body and the mind by force, an invasion into the private, personal inner space without consent: in short, an internal assault from one of the several avenues and by one of the several methods. This act of rape constitutes a deliberate violation of the woman’s physical, emotional/psychological and rational integrity and is a hostile, degrading
act of violence. Thus, in patriarchy, men indulge in the act of raping women either physically or psychologically or both.

In patriarchy, as Brownmiller points out, women are trained to be rape-victims and they are psychologically colonized and conditioned to helplessly acknowledge their special “victim status.” Patriarchy is thus an oppressive colonialist system that practices a sarcastic and trivial attitude to women being raped by men either physically or emotionally, an unjust and intolerable response to all types of violence which men direct at women. Often, as Brownmiller observes, for a rape-victim a direct confrontation falls outside of the behavioural norms in a system like patriarchy (257). That is, in patriarchy “direct confrontation” is the right of “man against man” and not “woman against man.” According to Brownmiller, the female victim mentality is conditioned in patriarchy. She explains:

“All women want to be raped”

“No woman can be raped against her will”

“She was asking for it”

“If you’re going to be raped, you might as well”

“Relax and enjoy it.” (311)
These are the deadly male myths of rape, the distorted proverbs that govern female sexuality in patriarchy. They are the beliefs that patriarchal men hold. The male power in patriarchy is so strong that men have managed to convince many women of these beliefs. For, to make a woman a willing participant in her own defeat is half the battle. In patriarchy, all mythologies in relation to rape have been ruthlessly created by men and they continue to act them out, generating a message to the entire manhood: “You kidnap female at gunpoint or by force or by trickery and you rape them repeatedly. You let the world know that you are men” (Brownmiller 308). Hence, feminist critics like Brownmiller eloquently speak about the urgent necessity of our age that women should begin to fight back their oppressors, their rapists and the patriarchs.

Thus, feminists like Rubin and Brownmiller make an urgent call for women to fight against patriarchy. By fighting back on different levels women can build a collective resistance to phallocentric oppression and violence. Such a fight back is necessary if women are to resist and end the imbalance and oppression, and rid both women and men of the patriarchal ideology of sexual oppression, gender bias, rape and so on. Oppression and injustice directed towards our women, our mothers, can be eradicated, not merely controlled or avoided, on an individual basis along with an approach that is long-ranged and
co-operative; that is, we need more women to come forward and fight back effectively (Brownmiller 404). This, in fact, requires the understanding and goodwill of women as well as men so that all injustice done against women, against mothers, in patriarchy like different kinds of rape or denial of right to children will finally be stopped. So, as feminists argue, it is high time to break or terminate the repressive space called patriarchy and realize that women have their own emotional and bodily experiences and integrity as men do. Hence, there is no point, in fact, no justice, in tagging or labelling “woman” as the “colonized” and “man” as the “colonizer” as patriarchy does. It is time to dethrone man of his “Colonizer” status in patriarchy, to bring the subordination and slavedom of woman (the colonized) to an end and to decolonize female body which has been under countless years of colonization and subjugation in the hands of the patriarchs.

The political objective behind every genuine feminist move is to “decolonize the body” of woman, of mother, in patriarchal culture. It is true that women are terrified of being raped physically or emotionally, but somewhere in every womb there is one rebellious nerve end that is powerful enough to deconstruct the “Myth of the Heroic Rapist,” to rupture and terminate the physical, sexual (body) and psychological (mind) colonization of women by men in patriarchy (Brownmiller 283). This feminist political act of “decolonizing the body” occurs along with
a move of resistance to the colonization of women’s bodies, mothers’ bodies, in a phallocentric universe. In other words, the feminist act of “decolonizing the body” is invariably connected to women’s resistance to patriarchy.

This study generates a new feminist theoretical space where woman’s “maternity” is restated as the source of effective strategic resistance to patriarchy. Women must take up the daring task of making men realize that the patriarchal norms are no longer capable of inscribing their enforcement on women’s bodies since they are equipped with a much stronger discursive force called “maternity.” This would generate a new feminist discursive realm, the space of maternity discourses, where the Woman-Mother successfully re-emerges as an instrumental exception to the patriarchal behavioural norms attached to women, to mothers, which Brownmiller traces in her work. In this new distinct feminist theoretical realm of maternity discourses, the Maternal in woman arises with unchallengeable resistance and power which patriarchy will find it hard to deal with.

By rupturing all the set patterns of rigid patriarchal codes of conduct, the Woman-Mother decolonizes her body herself using “maternity” as the source of strategic resistance to patriarchy. As we cross to this new “decolonized space” where the Woman-Mother exists as an independent and confident entity, the phallocentric notions of
sexual preference fail in its inscription of the female body and dethrone the patriarchal man/father of his position of being the Colonizer. Moreover, woman’s “maternity” emerges as a free, independent, productive and creative force, violating the patriarchal law. In the select fictional works by women, the “maternal power” in woman enables her to unexceptionably re-emerge herself as the strong source of resistance to patriarchy.

McMillan’s novel *Mama* is a fictional narrative that strategically establishes the Woman-Mother as the source of effective resistance to patriarchy, one who is unimaginably capable of decolonizing her body herself. As the novel begins, Mildred (the Woman-Mother) is introduced as the poor black woman-mother who suffers from extreme cruelty and domestic violence in the hands of her patriarchal husband Crook. Crook, a chronic alcoholic, is a typical patriarch who doubts and questions his wife’s loyalty and groundlessly blames Mildred for flirting with other men while he himself maintains an extramarital relationship with another woman named Ernestine. This drunkard takes on a monstrous quality as he returned home at nights, forcefully made Mildred undress, then shoved his half-naked wife into the bedroom and ruthlessly whipped her with his belt till he got tired and collapsed next to Mildred on the bed, and then raped her. Though Mildred is initially portrayed as a victim to “rape in marriage” in the opening pages of the novel, one
who seems to be helpless and vulnerable, the one rebellious nerve end in
the back of her womb slowly gains power and strength to fight back.
Soon, Mildred (the Woman-Mother) successfully fights back and
decolonizes her body herself from the holds of her patriarchal husband
using her “maternity” as a force, offering strategic resistance to the
oppressive colonial model called patriarchy. Thus, in the novel, Mildred
soon re-emerges as the powerful, independent and confident Mama, the
Woman-Mother, who poses herself as strategic resistance to patriarchy.
Mildred effectively fights back patriarchy as she throws off her
patriarchal husband Crook from her house and divorces him later. Thus,
by overthrowing the patriarchal dominance in her life, Mildred
transforms both her and her children’s lives productively and creatively.

There are several instances in the novel that manifest Mildred’s
“fight back” against the patriarchal colonial model. One such instance
occurs when Mildred, in the novel, finally re-emerges as the powerful
Woman-Mother who resists and rejects her patriarchal husband Crook as
she reflects on how she had been struggling hard to run the family while
her husband merely spent his time in drinking and in making love with
the woman named Ernestine:

Her eyes claimed everything she saw. This is my house,
she thought. I’ve worked too damn hard for you to be
hurting me all these years. And me, like a damn fool,
taking it. Like I’m your property. Like you own me or something. I pay all the bills around here, even this house note. I’m the one who scrubbed white folks’ floors . . . to buy it . . . Never even made up a decent excuse about what you did with your money. I know about Ernestine. I ain’t no fool. Just been waiting for the right time. Me and the kids . . . Mildred’s eyes scanned the faces of her five kids, framed in gold and black around the room. And you got the nerve to brag about how pretty, how healthy and how smart your kids are . . . These ain’t your damn kids. They mine. Maybe they got your blood, but they mine. (McMillan 13-15)

Here, Mildred, using her power as a Woman-Mother, explicitly resists the patriarchal ideology of treating “woman” as man’s private “property.” By reclaiming the right to her children, Mildred finally rejects the patriarchal man’s sense of ownership. This instance illustrates how Mildred (the Woman-Mother) decolonizes her body using her “maternity” as strategic resistance to the patriarchal law that sanctifies the dominance of the paternal. In other words, it is her “maternity,” her state of being a mother, that equips Mildred with an unchallengeable power with which the Woman-Mother reclaims the total right to her
children and finally renders Crook (the patriarchal man/father) weak and defeated.

Another instance that illustrates Mildred’s fight back and resistance to the colonial structures of patriarchy occurs as the rebellious Mama in Mildred revives and shoots one of her neighbourhood friends, a boy named Deadman, with a gun when she comes to know that the boy once tried to rape her daughter Feda:

Mildred walked to the telephone . . . It felt like her insides were grinding. “Feda, this is your mama. I’m gon’ ask you a simple question and I want a simple answer. And don’t lie to your mama, and don’t be scared. What did Deadman do to you when I was in Niagara Falls?” There was silence on the other end of the phone. “Answer me, goddammit!”

“He tried to choke me and he threw me down on the couch because he was drunk and he tried to rape me but I didn’t let him do it, Mama, I swear . . .”

Mildred slammed the phone down, walked back to her bedroom off the kitchen, and reached under her mattress for the .38. She made sure it was still loaded, marched back to the kitchen, pointed it at Deadman, and said, “Here, motherfucker, scratch this!” And fired four shots
at him . . . Mildred . . . just sat there---did not move, did
not blink an eyelid---and simply said, “Get him out of
here before I kill him.” When it was learned that
Deadman would be okay, that only two of the bullets had
actually hit him, one in his groin and one in his side, they
released Mildred from jail. She had told them that
Deadman had tried to rape her and she’d shot him in self-
defense. They believed her, but Deadman denied it, so
they let him go free too. As soon as Mildred got home,
she called up Minnie, his mama, and told her that if she
ever saw Deadman walking the streets of Point Haven as
long as she lived there, so help her God, she would put
another .38 bullet so deep in his ass that it would be
the last step he’d ever take. The next day, Minnie put
Deadman on a bus to Alabama. (McMillan 116-17)

Here, transgressing all patriarchal codes of conduct, Mildred
(the Woman-Mother) enters into a direct confrontation with the man
who tried to rape her daughter. This, in turn, deconstructs the patriarchal
definition of “direct confrontation” as the right of “man against man”
and not “woman against man.” Though the patriarchal society outside
lets Deadman go scot-free, he can never escape the wrath of the
powerful Mama in Mildred that the man is finally forced to leave Point
Haven following the Woman-Mother’s threat. Thus, from here on, the character Deadman disappears from the novel’s plot totally and forever. This instance, therefore, undoubtedly emerges as another effective manifestation of Mildred’s, the Woman-Mother’s, fight back against the colonial structures of patriarchy and her subsequent triumph over the oppressive system.

Another similar instance in the novel that deconstructs and disrupts the stability and coherence of the patriarchal discourse occurs when Mildred explicitly questions and dismisses the patriarchal discourse of the ultimate supremacy and divinity of the male maintained in the name of God. Mildred addresses her sister-in-law Curly and says:

You know, y’all niggahs kill me. As soon as something terrible happen, the first thang you do is go running to church like God is gon’ hop down out the sky and save y’all ass. Well, I don’t buy it. Ain’t never bought it. It ain’t that I don’t believe in God, I just don’t trust his judgment. (McMillan 290)

At this instance, Mildred (the Woman-Mother) actually questions the unquestionable permanence and dominance of the patriarchal discourse – the discourse of the Man/Father/God – as she says, “I just don’t trust his judgment.” This instance can, therefore, be considered as an implicit manifestation of the Woman-Mother’s strategic resistance to the
patriarchal discourse of Western philosophy, of Christianity, of the Fathers of the Church.

As the novel *Mama* nears its end, we also come across another wonderful instance that makes a reference to how Mildred realizes her “maternity” as a force offering strategic resistance to patriarchy. This occurs in the context when she receives a phone call from her daughter Freda just before the woman returns home, back to Mildred (Mama), as the novel ends:

“Hi, sweetheart,” Mildred said in a singsong voice when she answered the phone. She felt light inside, and for the first time in a long time, she could think straight. She didn’t care why or what for or how come. She only knew that for the past ten years she’d felt like she’d been buried alive and had finally dug her way back up to the surface---to topsoil---and right this minute if you had given her a shove, Mildred knew she could dig her way out of any hole, no matter how deep it was. (McMillan 302)

Thus, as Mildred receives Freda’s phone call which is followed by the woman’s return, the powerful Mama in Mildred is once again revived and the Woman-Mother once again re-emerges as an independent entity immune to all the patriarchal obstacles outside. For Mildred, as she
implicitly hints at this instance, her “maternity,” her state of being a mother, actually offers a way out from all the colonial structures of patriarchy. So, in short, McMillan’s novel *Mama* is an extraordinarily effective literary attempt that testifies woman’s “maternity,” as in Mildred’s case, as the new discursive source of strategic resistance to patriarchy, a means to effectively fight back, decolonize and free her body from the colonial shackles of patriarchy.

Donoghue’s novel *Room*, like *Mama*, is also a fictional narrative that demonstrates the Woman-Mother’s incredibly unimaginable power to decolonize her body herself using her “maternity” as effective strategic resistance to the patriarchal colonial model. In the novel, Ma is the Woman-Mother whom the male pervert Old Nick had kidnapped and locked up in a tiny room at a tender age and raped her repeatedly in spite of all her protests and struggles. Ma had thus been subjected to multiple accounts of “rape in captivity.” During her seven long years of incarceration in the tiny room, Ma underwent the experience of being raped repeatedly by Old Nick, of having an abortion at a young age and later of giving birth to Jack all alone by herself under medieval conditions in the tiny cell. The novel is all about Ma, how she manages to fight back Old Nick, rescues herself and her five-year-old son Jack from their years of incarceration in the tiny room and finally succeeds in
beginning their life anew, dismissing all the apprehensions and anxieties of the patriarchal society outside.

There are several instances in the novel *Room* that reveal Ma’s strong resistance to the patriarchal dominance. For example, the Woman-Mother’s fight back against Old Nick (the patriarchal man/father) and her subsequent triumph reveal her strategic resistance to patriarchy. Though Old Nick, the representative of the colonist space of patriarchy, initially seems to advance in colonizing Ma and in denying her freedom and expression, the novel’s plot does not give context for Old Nick to evolve effectively as the Colonizer, the patriarch. In other words, though Old Nick has initially colonized Ma’s body, he is not strong or competent enough as a Colonizer to intervene in her power of mothering. For instance, when Ma gives birth to Jack in the tiny cell (Room), Old Nick is shunned away as Ma makes the man leave Room. This instance is referred to while Ma once describes to Jack her experience of having an abortion and her experience of giving birth to Jack later all alone by herself as follows:

... remember the cord that goes to the belly button...
the girl baby, it got tangled when she was coming out, so she couldn’t breathe...
He was right there, watching... He didn’t know the first thing about babies getting born, he hadn’t even bothered...
to Google it. I could feel the top of her head, it was all slippery, I pushed and pushed, I was shouting, ‘Help, I can’t, help me---’ And he just stood there . . . She came out blue . . . She never opened her eyes . . . The cord was all knotted around her neck . . . He took her away and buried her under a bush in the backyard . . . The her part of her, that went straight back up to Heaven . . . Maybe it really was you, and a year later you tried again and came back down as a boy . . . I didn’t let him in Room that time . . . I heard Door, the beeping, and I roared, ‘Get out’ . . . I was ready, this time I wanted it to be just me and you . . . You were born with your eyes open. (Donoghue 255-57)

Here, we find that, as part of her resistance, Ma is actually posing a strong threat to that which ultimately constitutes man’s colonial power in patriarchy, the paternal. Moreover, Ma’s victory over the Colonizer in the colonial battle is further substantiated with her success in not allowing Old Nick to speak, touch or even have a sight of Jack. As Ma escapes from her captivity under Old Nick along with her son and as she succeeds in getting Old Nick arrested and jailed-up, she engages in an act of effective resistance against the colonialist space of patriarchy.
In *Room*, Ma (the Woman-Mother) has opened-up an ever-new possibility of using her maternity, in fact her son Jack, as a weapon to fight back, posing a strong resistance to the act of intimidation and violence she was subjected to in the hands of Old Nick for a long while. This initiates the decolonization of Ma’s body which is managed by using her maternal power as the sole source for this imperative feminist political act. Though all her initial attempts to fight and resist Old Nick in Room fail, it is her “maternity,” her state of being a mother, which gives Ma the real strength to remain undeterred by the hostile circumstances. After she gives birth to Jack, Ma behaves as if she has become completely submissive and passive to Old Nick and remains quiet at all his reproaches and sarcasm. But as the novel progresses, we realize that beneath Ma’s terrible silence and quietness, and beneath her pseudo-passivity, there lies a powerful colonized, a strong Woman-Mother, designing effective plans to make the Colonizer quit her body forever. Thus, as Ma plays wife to Old Nick in Room after the birth of Jack, it actually turns out to be her political strategy to gather all her strength and confidence to fight back, to pose resistance and finally decolonize her body from the hold of patriarchy. Thus, for Ma, in Room, her “pseudo” silence, passivity and physical submission to Old Nick are the only means to secure and protect her son Jack. As Old Nick is the sole source of basic necessities of life like food, cloths, medicines and so
on for Ma and Jack in the tiny room, Ma thought it would be brave on her part to stay quiet and passive until the time favoured her uprising. The only thing Ma asked for from Old Nick in return for being submissive to the male pervert is to distance himself completely from Jack, her son. She always succeeds in keeping Old Nick away from her son and the voice of this all-powerful Woman-Mother resounds as Ma, in Room, once tells Jack: “I just don’t want him looking at you. Even when you were a baby, I always wrapped you up in Blanket before he came in” (Donoghue 32). Moreover, in the novel, Ma reclaims the total right to her son Jack and simultaneously denies Old Nick of his position of being the patriarchal man/father. This is revealed as Ma, while being interviewed by the media person in the Clinic after her and her son’s escape from their years of incarceration in the tiny room, says at an instance: “Jack’s nobody’s son but mine . . . He reminds me of nothing but himself” (Donoghue 293-94). Thus, Ma (the Woman-Mother), using the power that springs from her “maternity,” overpowers Old Nick and renders the patriarchal man/father weak and overthrown. Hence, Ma, paradoxically, uses her “maternity,” which patriarchy regards as the core of woman’s vulnerability, as an instrument to challenge the universality and eternity of the very same social order founded on phallocentrism. Ma, therefore, successfully fights back, wins over the Colonizer and re-emerges as the powerful Woman-Mother who stands as an
instrumental exception and challenge to the patriarchal behavioural norms. This, in turn, coincides with the disappearance of the shadowy presence of Old Nick, the patriarchal man/father, the Colonizer.

Another instance in the novel that reflects Ma’s strong resistance to patriarchy occurs when the Woman-Mother forcefully makes her patriarchal dad (whom Jack calls Grandpa) accept Jack as his grandson. Ma’s dad, Grandpa, finds it difficult to accept Jack as his grandson and thus remains indifferent to the boy when he makes a visit to the Clinic to see his daughter. The scene is described in the voice of Jack:

Ma butts in. “Dad, this is Jack.”

He shakes his head.

But I am Jack, was he expecting a different one?

He’s looking at the table, he’s all sweaty on his face. “No offense.”

“What do you mean, ‘no offense’?” Ma’s talking nearly in a shout.

“I can’t be in the same room. It makes me shudder.”

“There’s no ‘it.’ He’s a boy. He’s five years old,” she roars. (Donoghue 282)

Here, in a way, Grandpa (Ma’s dad) echoes Old Nick, though unknowingly, when he calls Jack “it” and not “he.” For instance, once when Old Nick happens to hear Jack whisper, while being in Room, the
old pervert says “It speaks” which in turn is followed by Jack’s response “Why does he say ‘it’ not ‘he’?” (Donoghue 45). Old Nick thus calls Jack “it” and not “he.” Hence, both Old Nick and Grandpa, in one way or the other, dubs the voice of the colonialist space of patriarchy. The above mentioned conversation between Ma and her dad, reproduced in the voice of Jack, continues:

“I’m saying it wrong, I’m---it’s the jet lag. I’ll call you later from the hotel, OK?” The man who’s Grandpa is gone past me without looking, he’s nearly at the door. There’s a crash, Ma’s banged the table with her hand.

“It’s not OK.”

“OK, OK.”

“Sit down, Dad.”

He doesn’t move.

“He’s the world to me,” she says . . .

(Of course, it’s only natural.” The Grandpa man wipes the skin under his eyes. “But all I can think of is that beast and what he---”

“Oh, so you’d rather think of me dead and buried?”

He shakes his head again.

“Then live with it,” says Ma. “I’m back---”

“It’s a miracle,” he says.
“I’m back, with Jack. That’s two miracles.”

He puts his hand on the door handle. “Right now, I just can’t---”


Nobody does anything.

Then the Grandpa comes back to the table and sits down.

Ma points to the chair beside him so I go on it even though I don’t want to be here . . .

Grandpa takes off his cap, he looks at me. “Pleased to meet you, Jack.” (Donoghue 282-83)

Here, the attitude of Grandpa, who finds it hard to accept Jack as his normal grandchild, makes him represent one of those ancient patriarchs who viewed rape as a “property crime” of “man against man.” It is this patriarchal father who is brought into light in Grandpa, though not explicitly, as he calls Old Nick “that beast” who has “stolen” away his daughter, her virginity, his pride. So, in patriarchy, when a woman is taken by force and raped by a man, she is regarded as the “stolen” property (like land or money) and not a kidnapped “subject,” a “human-self.” So, for Grandpa, Jack can no longer be accepted as his grandson since he sees the five-year-old boy as an end-product, a reminder, of a crime done not against his daughter on the first hand, but against him by another man: the abduction and rape of his daughter by the pervert Old
Nick. However, Ma forcefully makes her dad accept Jack as his grandson. This instance also reveals the Woman-Mother’s strong command over patriarchy. So, in short, Donoghue’s novel Room is a literary attempt that practically makes a brilliant move in establishing woman’s maternity as an effective discursive force powerful enough to overturn the colonial structures of patriarchy.

Like Mama and Room, Hannah’s The Things We Do for Love is another novel that effectively restates woman’s “maternity” as strategic resistance to the patriarchal colonial model. In the novel The Things We Do for Love, Angie (the Woman-Mother) decolonizes her body from the colonial fetters of patriarchy using her “maternity,” her state of being a mother. Angie is initially introduced as the Woman-Mother who is emotionally broken down following the death of her daughter Sophia (the baby-girl had lived for only a few short days). Meanwhile, Angie’s husband Conlan (the patriarchal man/father) remains indifferent to the uncontrollable maternal instincts in Angie and therefore constantly tries to remind himself and Angie “that they could make a full, wonderful life without children” (Hannah 229). Conlan is thus the representative of the colonial structures of patriarchy which, by sanctifying the emotions and desires of the man/father, deliberately turn a blind eye to the Woman-Mother’s feelings and emotions. In other words, Angie’s maternal feelings remain alien to her
patriarchal husband Conlan and the man never attempts to make an
effort to understand the Woman-Mother’s feelings. However, Angie
(the Woman-Mother) strongly and successfully resists Conlan’s frequent
attempts to make love to her by trying to repress her maternal feelings.
One such instance when Angie effectively resists and overpowers
Conlan’s moves to repress her maternal feelings occurs when Angie
recollects the memories of her dates with Conlan:

Angie hardly slept that night. When she . . . closed her
eyes, all she saw were memories . . .

She and Conlan were in New York four years ago for
his birthday. He’d bought her an Armani dress---her first
designer garment.

“It cost more than my first car. I don’t think I can wear it.
We should return it, in fact. There are children starving in
Africa . . .”

He came up beside her . . . “Let’s not worry about the
starving children tonight. You look beautiful.”

She turned . . . and looked up into his . . . eyes. She
should have told him she loved him more than life, more
even than the babies God had withheld from them. Why
hadn’t she? . . . “It’s the wrong time,” she’d said . . .
Another memory came to her. More recent. This time they were in San Francisco on business . . . Conlan . . . thought they could make a romantic weekend out of it, or so he’d said . . . In the Promenade Bar, thirty-four stories above the busy San Francisco streets, they chose a window table . . .

Conlan . . . smiled . . . “None of your DeSaria economy plans for us tonight. We’ve got the money, Ange. We might as well spend it.”

Finally, she understood. He’d come along on this trip not in search of romance, but rather in search of a different life . . . a full, wonderful life without children . . . What she should have said was “Then I’ll have . . . drinks . . . and order the lobster.” It would have been so easy. He would have kissed her then, and maybe their new life would have begun. Instead, . . . “Don’t ask me to give it up,” she’d whispered. “I’m not ready.” (Hannah 228-30)

Here, Angie strongly resists Conlan’s attempts forcing her to make love with him by shedding all her maternal feelings. And finally, at this instance, Angie eloquently declares to her patriarchal husband that she can never give up her maternal feelings. This instance emerges as an effective literary manifestation of the Woman-Mother’s strong resistance
to patriarchy, a system that survives on the act of endlessly oppressing women, mothers.

In the novel, woman’s “maternity,” her state of being a mother, re-emerges as a new discursive force that generates a power which is beyond the understanding and imagination of the patriarchal representatives like Conlan. For instance, even though Conlan seems to represent the stereotypical patriarch who remains stubborn and immune to change, as the novel progresses the man is gradually overpowered and transformed by the powerful Woman-Mother in Angie. In fact, it is Lauren who revives the strength of Angie’s “maternity,” her state of being a mother. In other words, with the girl’s entry in her life, the powerful Woman-Mother in Angie is once again revived. Fighting against all the patriarchal interventions, Angie emotionally accepts Lauren as her daughter. Battling against all patriarchal warnings and apprehensions, Angie (the Woman-Mother) succeeds in beginning her life anew with Lauren as the pregnant girl comes to live with her after being abandoned by her mom. Initially, when Conlan comes to know about Angie allowing a teenage-girl, that too a pregnant one, to live in her house, the man is terribly disturbed and he protests against his wife’s decision. But, Angie (the Woman-Mother) effectively resists her patriarchal husband’s protests:
“I need to tell you something,” she said . . . “There’s this girl . . . She’s a good girl. Perfect grades. Hardworking . . . I hired her . . . She works at the restaurant about twenty hours a week. You know, after school, weekends . . . she’s the best waitress they’ve ever had.”

Conlan eyed her . . . “Angie . . . I know you. Now what the hell are we really talking about here? . . .”

“Her mother abandoned her . . . Just walked out one day.”

His gaze was steady. “Tell me you found her a place to live---”

“Gave her a place.”

Conlan blew out a heavy breath. “She’s living with you at the cottage?”

“Yes.”

Disappointment stamped itself on his face---in his . . . eyes, in his frowning mouth. “So you have a teenager living in the house.”

“It’s not like that . . . I’m just helping her out . . .”

. . . “Oh, shit,” Conlan said . . . He stormed into the bathroom, slammed the door shut behind him . . . He finally came out . . . His anger seemed to have gone;
without it, he looked tired. His shoulders were rounded in defeat. “You said you’d changed.”

“I have.” . . . “She’s a seventeen-year-old with no one to take care of her and nowhere to go. I’m helping her . . . Come meet her . . . Just come and meet her . . . For me.” (Hannah 301-02)

Here, we come across the powerful Woman-Mother in Angie who gradually forces Conlan to implicitly accept his defeat and retreat from his protests against Angie’s act of allowing the pregnant Lauren to live with her. Thus, as the novel progresses further, Conlan is forced to accept Angie’s move of emotionally accepting Lauren as her daughter. An instance of this is revealed in the conversation between Angie and Conlan:

“ . . . I love Lauren . . . I . . . let her into my heart . . . I’m glad I did. She’s how I came back to myself . . .”

. . . “She’s not Sophia,” he said . . .

“She’s somebody’s Sophia. She’s a scared seventeen-year-old who needs someone to love her, to take care of her. How can I say no to her? . . . When we’re right here?”

“Damn you, Angie.” He pushed past her, went into the other room.
She crossed the room, came up beside him. “How can we say no?” She said again, forcing him to face her. “It’s different this time, Con. We’re different. We could be a team. We’ll be the parents we always wanted to be. I swear it.”

He stared down at her, his eyes bright. “Damn you,” he said, sinking slowly to his knees. “I can’t live without you anymore.”

“Then don’t.” She kissed him. “Trust me, Conlan. This time we’ll last forever.” (Hannah 364-66)

This instance manifests how the powerful Woman-Mother in Angie slowly transforms Conlan so that the patriarchal man/father finally finds it really hard and even impossible to reject the irresistibly persuasive demand from Angie to take Lauren in the place of their dead daughter Sophia. In other words, Angie’s “maternity,” her state of being a mother, transforms Conlan completely that he soon wholeheartedly accepts Lauren as his daughter. Angie, in the novel, therefore re-emerges as the Woman-Mother who poses strategic resistance to the colonial structures of patriarchy and subsequently triumphs in overpowering and transforming her patriarchal husband Conlan so that he no longer remains a patriarchal man/father but one who is totally submissive to the powerful Woman-Mother. Thus, the novel simply rejects the scope for
Conlan to effectively evolve as the patriarchal Colonizer since the power of Angie’s “maternity” renders the man weak and vulnerable and makes him accept the Woman-Mother’s decisions and choices regarding their life. So, in short, Hannah’s novel *The Things We Do for Love* can be considered as a literary attempt that excellently demonstrates woman’s “maternity” as a force that poses strategic resistance to the colonial model of patriarchy and thereby facilitates the feminist political act of “decolonizing the body.”

Like the novels analysed above, Shriver’s novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is also a fictional narrative that illustrates the Woman-Mother’s strategic resistance to the patriarchal dominance. Eva (the Woman-Mother), in the novel, poses her “maternity,” her state of being a mother, as strategic resistance to the colonial constructs of patriarchy and thereby decolonizes her body herself from the patriarchal colonial institution of motherhood. In other words, in the novel, Eva’s unique experience of “mothering” constitutes a new discursive realm that deconstructs all the pre-existent or pre-set patriarchal notions of motherhood. Eva’s strong resistance to the oppressive patriarchal system is excellently manifested in her attempts to resist and reject her husband’s deliberate moves to play the dominant patriarchal man/father to their son Kevin. Franklin, Eva’s patriarchal husband, constantly blames the Woman-Mother for being a “bad mother” whenever she tries
to bring his attention to Kevin’s strange affinity to violence. He, thus, represents the senselessness and irrationality of the typical patriarchal man/father who, by turning a blind eye to his son’s mischievous deeds, eagerly indulges himself in raising constant accusations against his wife for being an unloving “bad mother.” Franklin is, thus, a replica of the patriarchal society outside which later impatiently starts to put the entire blame on Eva for the massacre committed by her son, a replica of an oppressive system that constantly finds fault with the Woman-Mother. In the novel, Franklin, the representative of patriarchy, attempts to emotionally or psychologically rape Eva (the Woman-Mother) as he continuously condemns her for being a “bad mother” to Kevin. However, Eva (the Woman-Mother) successfully resists and survives all such attempts made by the patriarchal man/father.

There are several instances in the novel which reveal Eva’s resistance to the until-then-unquestioned dominance of Franklin (the patriarchal man/father) as she, in her letters addressed to her dead husband, strongly points out the man’s responsibility in turning their son a killer-boy. For instance, Eva, in one of her letters, addresses Franklin and says:

You regarded a child as a partial creature, a simpler form of life . . . But from the instant he was laid on my breast I perceived Kevin Khatchadourian as pre-extant, with a
vast, fluctuating interior life . . . while your experience was one of sunny, leisurely access. (Shriver 137)

Here, Eva (the Woman-Mother) hints at Franklin’s utter failure in understanding their son Kevin. Franklin, rather than realizing Kevin’s right to a full and different life, merely regards the boy as part of his self. For him, Kevin is just a copy of the man himself and he therefore burdens the boy with his own expectations and demands. Franklin, like all the patriarchal men/fathers, makes futile attempts to forcefully impose all his interests and views on his son. This, in turn, develops in Kevin an aversion to Franklin’s company. Eva comments on this in one of her letters addressed to her dead husband:

The . . . thing that amazed me was his curious aversion to your company. You may not remember, since after he’d rebuffed you once or twice---imploring when you popped in that he’d like to go to sleep or laying your present of rare collectible comics silently, wearily on the floor--- you were injured enough to withdraw . . . I comforted you that children always prefer their mothers when they’re sick, but you were still a little jealous. Kevin was breaking the rules, ruining the balance. Celia was mine, and Kevin was yours . . . But I think that was the very reason he recoiled: your insistence, your
crowding, your wanting, your . . . Daddishness. It was too much. He didn’t have the energy—not to give you the intimacy you demanded, but to resist it. Kevin made himself up for you, and there must have been, in the very lavishness of his fabrication, a deep and aching desire to please. But do you ever consider how disappointed he must have been when you accepted the decoy as the real thing? (Shriver 280)

Here, again, Eva explicitly blames Franklin (the patriarchal man/father) for being responsible in depositing feelings of disappointment and frustration in Kevin that the boy gradually develops an irresistible and inevitable aversion to his father. Moreover, at this instance, Eva (the Woman-Mother) eloquently resists and rejects the patriarchal tendency of seeing the boy-child as “belonging” solely to the “man/father.”

Thus, in the novel, Eva (the Woman-Mother) reclaims the total right to her son as part of her act of decolonizing herself from the colonial constructs of patriarchy using her “maternity.” This is manifested at several instances in the fictional narrative. For example, Eva (the Woman-Mother) vocally fights back Franklin’s move to name Kevin after himself and forces her patriarchal husband to accept her decision to name the child after herself. Eva addresses Franklin and says:
I don’t know what took me so long to notice that you were simply assuming that our baby would take your surname . . . Men have always gotten to name children after themselves, while not doing *any of the work* . . .

Time to turn the tables. (Shriver 70-71)

Thus, as we find here, Eva (the Woman-Mother) reclaims the total right to her son as she overthrows Franklin from his position of being the unchallengeable patriarchal man/father and forcefully makes the man agree to name their son after herself as Kevin Khatchadourian. This instance, therefore, manifests the Woman-Mother’s use of the power that springs from her “maternity,” her state of being a mother, to fight back and decolonize her body from the colonial model of patriarchy. Another similar instance that reveals Eva’s act of reclaiming the total right to her son occurs when Eva, in one of her letters, addresses Franklin and says:

. . . I did . . . consider that, between us, I was the more interested in Kevin . . . I mean, interested in Kevin as Kevin really was, not Kevin as Your Son, who had continually to battle against the formidable fantasy paragon in your head, with whom he was in far more ferocious competition . . . . (Shriver 136-37)

While reclaiming the total right to her son, Eva severely criticizes the patriarchal man/father’s tendency to define his child in accordance with
the phallocentric fantasies and paragons in his head. Eva (the Woman-Mother), in the novel, dismisses all such patriarchal paragons and wholeheartedly accepts her son, Kevin, as he really is. All these instances in the novel, therefore, illustrate how Eva (the Woman-Mother) implicitly decolonizes her body from the holds of the pre-fixed patriarchal institutions using her “maternity,” her state of being a mother, as the source of resistance to the very same oppressive institutional settings. So, in short, Shriver’s novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* emerges as a literary attempt that effectively demonstrates the Woman-Mother as the new discursive force offering strategic resistance to the colonial constructs of patriarchy.

Maracle’s collection of short stories *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*, like the fictional narratives analysed above, is also a work of fiction that carries instances illustrating the Woman-Mother’s act of decolonizing her body using her “maternity” as strategic resistance to the patriarchal colonial chains. For instance, in the story “First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style,” the Woman-Mother (the narrator) recollects the flood narrative from her Salish culture that deconstructs the patriarchal discourse of Western philosophy, of Christianity, of the Fathers of the Church. The Woman-Mother narrates the Salish flood narrative as follows:
It was after the flood, the tidewaters were receding. The earth had cleaned up much of the cadaverous mess that occurred after the loss of so much mammalian life. Our response to the flood was not as tidy as the Christian one . . . This story might have turned out differently if God had given us either the time or instructions to build an ark and climb aboard with all the paired animals . . . The heroes in . . . our flood stories are women---sisters who saved . . . other sisters, their children, or sacrificed themselves for expectant mothers . . . The women did not . . . rescue men. At least, if any woman did rescue a man, that story did not get handed down in my family . . . my mother and grandmother used to say that women did not try to save the men because . . . while it takes all the women to repopulate a village, it takes only one man. (Maracle 6-7)

Thus, the Salish flood narrative, which the Woman-Mother (the narrator) recollects in the story, transgresses and ruptures the golden rules of the male-centred discourse in the phallocentric universe. Moreover, the women survivors in the Salish flood narrative deconstruct the sanctified colonial laws of patriarchy as they use the man, who arrives in a big
canoe, as an “object” to get themselves pregnant. This is narrated by the Woman-Mother:

. . . they retreated one at a time to the lean-to with him. He managed to satisfy the first two but was exhausted by the time the last woman entered the lean-to. He could not arouse himself. He felt so guilty, but the last woman . . . wasn’t worried; he wasn’t going anywhere for a while and she would have her chance to become pregnant. (Maracle 12)

The women survivors in the Salish flood narrative, as the Woman-Mother narrates, pose strategic resistance to the colonial constructs of patriarchy as they use the same man as a mere “object” to become pregnant. The women-mothers in the Salish flood narrative deconstruct the patriarchal discourse of male-dominance as they later dethrone the very same man from his position of being the patriarchal man/father to their children by denying him even the knowledge of himself being the father to their children. These women-mothers, in other words, reclaim the total right to their children by deliberately and strategically keeping the man unaware of his children, of his paternal ownership. The Woman-Mother narrates:
On her back was this baby, but he didn’t know what it was. He asked her, “What’s that . . . thing on your back?”

“You don’t know?” she purred, and she trotted her fingers along his arm, his chest and touched his face. The pull of her husky voice distracted his mind . . . Soon he forgot his question. All summer long he complained about the noisy . . . thing, but she never said anything to him when he did. Let him complain, she thought, I know how to quiet him . . . As he was getting ready to leave that next fall, he asked her again, “Where did you get that thing?”

“You don’t know?” she answered.

“No,” he said.

“You will know when you need to know,” she responded . . .

. . . He saw the new babies and again asked where they got them. The women giggled, touched . . . his chest and his arms and said, “You don’t know?” They all purred. (Maracle 8-12)

This instance excellently illustrates how the women-mothers implicitly fight back the male-dominance in patriarchy by rendering the patriarchal
man/father weak, vulnerable and senseless. In other words, the women-mothers decolonize their bodies from the colonial holds of patriarchy by using their “maternity,” their maternal power, as strategic resistance to the very same oppressive system.

Another instance that hints at women’s use of their “maternity,” their state of being mothers, as strategic resistance to patriarchy occurs in the story “Blessing Song.” In the story, while on their boat-trip to Puget Sound, the Woman-Mother (the narrator) and her daughter stand on the boat’s deck pressed up against one another with her granddaughter standing behind them as the pod of killer whales approach. The captain of the boat warns them to come inside, but the two women-mothers, the narrator and her daughter, laugh at the man and never move. The Woman-Mother narrates:

The captain tells us . . . “You may want to come inside,” he hollers at us.

“Not a chance,” we answer back at the same time and laugh. My granddaughter stands behind us as though we could actually protect her . . . The captain slows the boat down . . . We stand pressed up against one another. The biggest of the whales swims within six feet of the boat, stands straight up and murmurs at us. The captain is stunned. (Maracle 30)
Here, we may consider the captain as a representative of the patriarchal colonial model who regards himself as the responsible colonial “master” who is forced to carry the “historic patriarchal burden” of ensuring women’s, mothers’, protection. By dethroning him from his position of being the patriarchal man-protector, the two women-mothers in the story dismiss the captain’s warning and implicitly mock at the patriarchal man’s apprehension. As the biggest of the killer whales comes unusually close to the boat, both women-mothers sing a song that connects them forever. The people on board are curious about the song, but the two women-mothers never wish to break the spell that their song has created for them, and they address the people on board and say, “It’s just a song” (Maracle 31). Here, the people on board represent the patriarchal society outside and the song sung by the women-mothers symbolically represents the song of women’s “maternity” that generates a magical power which is beyond the understanding and imagination of patriarchy. Thus, in this way, the two women-mothers in the story pose strong resistance to patriarchy and subsequently triumph in resurrecting themselves to a new discursive realm where their bodies are finally decolonized from the patriarchal colonial model.

Another instance that illustrates the Woman-Mother’s use of her “maternity,” her state of being a mother, to fight back the colonial institutions of patriarchy occurs in the story “Laundry Basket.” Marła
(the Woman-Mother), in the story, deconstructs the sacred rules that run along with the patriarchal institution of motherhood. As the story begins, Marla is introduced as an independent and confident woman-mother, a struggling writer, who, after the divorce, succeeds in leading a new and better life for herself and her children through her writing. Marla’s patriarchal husband always tried to emotionally or psychologically rape her as he constantly blamed the Woman-Mother for delaying the laundry and thereby becoming a “bad mother” to his children:

“My mother held a job and did the laundry, too.” The quality of his voice has changed. During his endless complaining about her unwillingness to work and work and work, his voice had been loud and arrogant . . . as though . . . he knew she was not keeping up with the holy duties of motherhood. (Maracle 48)

However, Marla (the Woman-Mother) successfully fights back and decolonizes her body from the colonial hands of her patriarchal husband that the man finally leaves the house and disappears. Later, Marla divorces the man and the Woman-Mother, challenging the patriarchal law, wins the custody of her children after the divorce. Thus, the powerful Woman-Mother in Marla re-emerges as she begins her life anew with her two sons. As the story ends, Marla (the Woman-Mother) silently and proudly watches her two sons doing the laundry with joy:
. . . the two boys load the little Hoover and turn it on.

Another milestone. She hadn’t thought of that. It never occurred to her that for the boys, laundry is not looked upon as “woman’s work, wifely drudgery, not fit for male consumption.” It is new and they want to be a part of it. (Maracle 56)

Here, her sons’ act of doing the laundry with immense joy and excitement, in turn, testifies to Marla’s triumph as a woman-mother in effectively bringing up her sons as immune and resistant to the colonial divisions of labour in patriarchy. Marla (the Woman-mother), therefore, deconstructs the patriarchal institution of motherhood and decolonizes herself from the colonial chains of patriarchy by using her “maternity” as strategic resistance to the same oppressive system. So, in short, Maracle’s collection *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* proves to be a literary attempt that manifests woman’s “maternity” as a new discursive force which, by generating strategic resistance to patriarchy, effectively decolonizes her body from the endless years of oppression and subordination.

Thus, this chapter traces the different ways in which the Woman-Mother, in the select women’s fiction, effectively fights back the oppressive system called patriarchy. The analyses demonstrate that the select fictional works by women writers are brilliantly effective literary
attempts which show how the patriarchal discourse that seeks to produce a regulative order, paradoxically, results in empowering those (women-mothers) whom it seeks to subjugate. The select fictional works – *Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* – create immense space for the Woman-Mother to express her resistance against the colonial structure of patriarchy and, consequently, to decolonize her body using her innate and unique discursive force called “maternity.” In other words, the Woman-Mother’s use of her maternal power as a means to “fight back,” in the select women’s fiction, can be seen as an excellent representation or manifestation of Foucauldian model of reverse discourse.

The analyses show how the five works of fiction by women writers manifest woman’s “maternity” as the source of strategic resistance to patriarchy, effectively decolonizing female body. The five fictional works selected for the study together, therefore, stand as a solid proof of the emergence of the new, rebellious, powerful Woman-Mother. The Woman-Mother, in all these works, re-emerges as a decolonized, challenging discursive figure generating strategic resistance to the colonial structures of patriarchy. In other words, the select fictional works redefine the Woman-Mother’s body as a liberated realm of the self, of subjectivity, freeing it from being the site of patriarchal
inscription. The select women’s fictions demonstrate how the feminist political act of “decolonizing the female body” using woman’s “maternity” as a resistance discourse has strategically reversed the patriarchal concept of female body as a site for male conquest and oppression.