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The Feminine Patterns in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002)

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Declaration

We hereby declare that this thesis is a result of our personal researches and hard work and an innovative statement of our own experience under the supervision and guidance of Mrs. Hamza RAHIL. References and acknowledgement are made when necessary to other researchers.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this humble study to my precious father who always dreamt of seeing me in high positions, to my beloved mother who stayed up nights and nights supporting me to chase my goals, to my one and only brother for his help in this journey from the beginning, to my sister-in-law for her support. Thank you for being my source of encouragement and inspiration.

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Abstract

By living in a male dominated society, women are demonstrated as objects. To bring her heroines into the light, Sue Monk Kidd exhibits the incredible power of women especially a group of black women. The first part of this dissertation aims at research the transition of heroism in *The Secret Life of Bees*, it analyzes the interpretation of the conduct heroism regarding gender and race. Furthermore, it depicts an empowerment journey of black and white women relying on Maureen Mourdock's Conceptualization of heroism established in her book *The Heroine Journey*. It is considered moreover, with black characters movement to the center depending on Bell Hook's Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center. besides Agency and Leadership that empower black women in transcending the boundaries. Michelle Foucault's Discursive and Disciplinary Discourse and Patricia Hill Collin's 'Controlling Images' are central to interpret to Kidd's novel. For the second part, it investigates Kidd's ecofeminist consciousness against patriarchal system. It studies the domination of man over women and nature As well as, it interprets the symbolism of honey and bees as healing patterns, besides, the feminist representation of Black Madonna as a goddess illustration.

Key words: Bees, Black Feminism, Black Madonna, Controlling Images, Domination, Dualism, Ecofeminism, Heroism, Honey, Spirituality, Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*.

General Introduction:

“*Black* women are one of the most devaluated groups in American society, and they have been the recipients of a male abuse and cruelty that has known no bounds or limits. Since the black women has been stereotyped by both white man from either group to get protection from the other. Neither group feels that she deserves protection --- most young black men see their companions solely as objects to be exploited ---. Their perception of the black female as a degraded sexual object is similar to white male perceptions of the black female.”

Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* 108

Admitting that women embody equal part as men in the worldwide, still they are mistreated by the other; men. Women have been living in a masculine anti-feminist society where they portray a complex role. Thus, for years, the world of literature had been dominated by male authorship. Through eras, women position has been debatable. Coming back to the ancient Greek, the philosopher Aristotle in his work *Politics* states “the relation of male and female is by nature is a relation of superior to inferior and the ruler to the ruled” (20-21). According to him women have always been inferior and objects to men. In contrast to the philosopher Plato in *The Republic*, who thinks that women are qualified to be equal to men, he claims that “a man and woman who have physician mind have the same nature” (454). In the same token, Hegel and

Freud, portray women “as the eternal irony of the community, and the enemy of civilization” (qtd. in Glasgow *Feminism* 2). Similarly, to the heroic, literature has been

controlled by masculine mode of heroism. Hence, the portrayal of women in literature has been without doubt gender biased, and their roles have been condemned in the stereotypical image of housekeepers and mommies.

In this context, Feminism puts women in the forefront of countering to call for women’s independence, equal voice, and freedom of self-expression in all aspects of life. Consequently, feminists as activists, have acknowledged the inadequacy of male chauvinism by rejecting the masculine supremacy, and the subjugation of women. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar show throughout their book *The Madwomen in The Attic*, how men have been controlling both writing and communication. Likewise, female authors, start to prove themselves throughout their writings by breaking up the silence, and giving voice to their female characters.

By 1970s, contemporary black feminism has been created as a reaction to white feminism. A number of African American women, across a diversity of fields, stepped forward to recognize the double burden of being black and female. Among the black theorists who defended black women’s matter are Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins who have emerged as leading academics on black feminism. In the late twentieth century, the role of gender as a common form of oppression was challenged by the black feminists. Thus, many black female writers presented works based on strong platform where the present feminists stand on. Their main topics covered the African American female experiences facing the masculine

bias. They intended to free the black women's voices and bodies from the common black feminine pattern. Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* depicts African American women being "self-defined"; she exhibits black feminist emerging power as a mean of authority. In this regard, she clarifies that "I initially wrote *Black Feminist Thought* in order to help empower African-American women" (1). Along with black feminism, the experience of black women have been uniquely deposited relating to patriarchy, racism, and oppression.

Thus, contemporary literature mirrors the struggle of African American women writers while searching for identity and existence. Therefore, black female narration shows how black women resisted the stereotypical image of male abuse and oppression. The critics claim that the importance of communication is a significant characteristic of African American female writers. Dana A. Williams affirms that "Contemporary African American literature by African American women writers offers full expressions of the complexity of contemporary African American life, particularly, as this life relates to black women" (1).

Thus, this research aims at studying the feminine patterns as they are discussed in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*. Starting with women's journey in searching for empowerment and bodies liberation, to the spiritual influence of the black Madonna, and the psychological healing effect of the environment, in which the contemporary illustration of black women has been built on both black feminist and ecofeminist perspectives.

In the same token Sue Monk Kidd works are classified within contemporary literature. From a white woman living in Georgia south America to a worldwide author due to the huge success of her debut novel *The Secret Life of Bees*, Kidd is honored to write about black female matters, she is concerned with the contemporary literature in which she gives a new feminine image to her female characters. The influence of the interaction with the black community inspired her writings, where she defends the black women's battle against gender discrimination, male domination, and importantly the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society. She wants to give voice to black women and demonstrates the irrationality of racism and segregation. Sue monk Kidd published many masterpieces like *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002), *The Mermaid Chair* (2005), *The Invention of Wings* (2014), *The Book of Longings* (2020). Because of her successful career Sue Monk Kidd won numerous prizes, she was chosen as Good Morning, America's Read this Book Club Pick, The South Carolina Fellowship in Literature, and the 1996 Poets and Writers Exchange Program in Fiction.

Based on a journey, the secret life of bees, tells the story of a young woman LilyMelissa Owens whose life has been marked by her mother's loss and her father's abuse. After her mother passed away, Lily has been raised by a housekeeper named Rosaleen which in her turn was racialized. Consequently, Rosaleen chooses to take Lily and escapes toward South Carolina, the town that holds Lily's mother's death secret. Lily's journey started by joining the black community, where she has been welcomed by the three beekeepers who happened to be sisters May, June, and August. Thus, these sisters have an immense impression on Lily's character, personality, and psychodevelopment. The novel's characters have been portrayed as modern African

American women. In addition to the above, the black Madonna character has been a representation of feminine God in the novel who used to be worshiped, and symbolizes motherhood.

In the interest of this study, the choice of this novel as the subject of this research proposal and the coming thesis is for its incredible fame. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, the domination of society and nature goes together in the influence on women's struggle. Sue Monk Kidd's works shaped by her own experiences in a black community, as a result, she rejected all sorts of racism and oppression in which, she explores various themes regarding to black feminism as well as from an ecofeminist lens.

As a contemporary feminist writer, Sue Monk Kidd is a great fictional author from twentieth century till nowadays literature. Kidd is well known as bestseller due to the huge success of her first novel titled *The Secret Life of Bees* in which she won various prizes. Her works usually focus on the social issues in south America, and mostly about black women lives matter. Kidd is popular with her use of white main female character in *The Secret Life of Bees*, where she establishes her in a black community. In this context, Sharon Monteith in her book *Advancing Sisterhood? Interracial Friendships in Contemporary Southern Fiction*, examines the white women protagonist, in white women authors works. according to her, they generally authorize ethically their white main female characters inside with black women relationships to find a self-actualization, by applying the "sisterhood" as a major term. In this context, Lily due to her strong relationships in the black community finally found her inner peace. In Simon Baron Cohen *The Essential Difference*, women spontaneously

empathize to greater degree than do male (2). In the same way, August has the potential to underestimate Lily's sufferance and damage by playing role of her mother. Though, these previous studies shed lights on the portrayal of both motherhood and sisterhood, it impacts the relationships between black and white women.

In her essay, "Re-Writing the 'Master' Narrative: Sue Monk Kidd Journey to The Black Madonna", Kathleen Carico contents that "*The Secret Life of Bees* is premised on the sacrednesses of the female, a tradition that is quite recessive...of Western Christian Life and thought" (23). Kidd's novel traces Lily's psychological development. Being surrounded by Rosaleen and the three sisters allows her to share pure love, and spiritually affectionate to Black Madonna. In the same token, the use of the Black Mary has been positively criticized by Amy Lignitz Harken, where he emphasizes that the Black Madonna is strongly valorizing the feminine power and spiritual evolution. Harken in "Divine Mother" claims that "The Secret Life of Bees is a spiritual novel, concerned how the divine is manifest in the lives of Lily, Rosaleen, the Calendar Sisters" (20). As a result, the existence of Black Madonna in the characters' lives has an extreme influence on their faith. Furthermore, the above studies provide a backdrop to analyze the characters' self-independence and spirituality depends on the presence of Black Mary as a mean of female's power, this study departs from the feminine principles that the author stands on.

The critic Judith Hebb in *Conflict and Closure: Bees and Honey as a Metaphor for Healing in The Secret Life of Bee*, demonstrates the power of female community. Bees and Honey has been a psychological therapy to Lily's traumatic experience with her

abusive father (181). Hebb, in this context, refers to the influence of the bee sisters on Lily physically and psychologically. Likewise, Honey or the black Madonna as Hebb presented it, has a great influence on Lily's new life (180). Hence, the above study has dealt with the significance of bees and honey as a therapy and a healing tool. Thus, the departing point of this study relies on the writer's use of symbolism as an important mechanism to ecofeminism concept.

Critic Catherine B. Emmanuel in *The Archetypal Mother*, admits that the Black Madonna's interpretation is presented in Lily's story narration. It proposes "solace and spirituality" (115). At the same time, Lily's desire for motherhood goes beyond with her seek of psychological identity and a religion that affords her some meditation (115). The black Madonna is archetypal mother that all the female characters search for, which enable Lily to find her mother in the form of God (118). Furthermore, the black Mary appeases like a "psychological archetype of indomitable", as a result of her portrayal of "soul not defeated by the presentation of slavery" (118). Finally, Emmanuel studies Lily self-examination as a result of her black Madonna's worship, from those Lily comes to "realizes that her mother was imperfect, she begins to realistically deals with her mother's loss" (120). Although the above study has dealt with the portrayal of the archetypal mother, the black Madonna as an essential figure in the white and black women healing, this study focuses on the feminine elements that the writer relied on.

The above-mentioned studies on Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* deal with different issues, from race and gender, to male oppression and women subjugation. Moreover,

the basic point of this study stands on the focus of feminine pattern importance in African American female writings. Where the writers give a voice to the voiceless characters to provide self-esteem, identity formation, and leadership in literary works against the dominant narrative.

This study release on a considerable theoretical approaches and critical books, to study and Interpret Kidd's novel. It utilizes Hook's theory *From the Margin to the Center*. Hook's concept studies the controlling images of black women related to all forms of oppression. this concept often highlights the maltreatment of black women within the black patriarchy dominance. In this context Hooks proclaims that "eliminating sexism is the solution to the problem of men participating unequally or not at all in child care" (133-156).

This study also includes Simone de Beauvoir's of "Transcendence" (91). In her book *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir deals women status in the society. Accordingly, she demonstrates that the world where women live is man centered. Yet, "Men is active, woman is passive. Transcendence is active, creative, projecting, forward into the future, and Immanence is passive, internal, and centered on the maintenance of the species" Beauvoir defines (443). Women must abide by social norms that value that value the superiority of men. According to Beauvoir this concept has to be followed by both genders. She adds in truth, all human existence is Transcendence and Immanence in the same time; to go beyond itself, must maintain itself; to thrust itself toward the future, it must integrate the past into itself" (443).

This study also deals with Intersectionality discussed by Patricia Hill Collins in her book *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Collins analyzes the intersection of race, gender, and social classes. Hence, the empowerment of black women has been always the main subject of her discussion. She utilizes accessible language so that all black women could read and understand not just the intellectual ones. She also argues that is not enough to simply have a wide breadth of knowledge about social issues. Additionally, it uses as well the “Mammy” term coined by Collins in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Furthermore, Collins aims to explain and define the controlling images that devalue black women femininity.

This study as well applies the Ecofeminism theory that studies the celebration of women’s relation with nature in the works of African American writers. It was first termed by the French writer Françoise d’Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* 1974. Ecofeminists think that unjustified non-human domination of nature is a feminist issue. Ecofeminism in other perspective, seems to challenge not only the women and nature, but also the elimination of male- gender power. At its core, this study, analyses all forms of oppression and domination explored by patriarchy, as well as, it celebrates the relationship between the conscious of the African American feminism and nature.

This dissertation is divided into two main chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is entitled “Demarginalizing Femininity and Womanhood”. This chapter highlights the importance of feminine empowerment and the decolonization of the body in the

masculine society, it studies the stereotypical image of black women in Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, using Murdock's "Conceptualization of Heroism" to study the heroine journey toward decolonizing identity and body, besides the demarginalization of bodies to center. As well as, "the Oppressive Discourse and The Disciplinary Discourse" by Michelle Foucault will be used to study the impact of language and leadership on human behavior. This chapter will deal with Collins' "Controlling Images" to analyze the tropes that black women face with frequent basis. Collins' concept provides an analyzes to the way her female voices are controlled and oppressed, besides the fact that black women have been regarded as the "other".

The second chapter is entitled "Environmental Healing: The Decolonization of Women and Nature". Building on the work of Sue Monk Kidd's novel, this chapter attempts to interpret *The Secret Life of Bees* from an ecofeminism lens. Yet, this chapter explores the ecofeminist consciousness of the novel throughout strong black female characters and environment that resist the oppression of patriarchy. In addition, this chapter interrogates the attributes and significance of bees, honey, and black Mary as metaphors of life, which take an obvious feminine trait, embodies the ecofeminist stance. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to fill in the gap, by drawing the interconnection of women and black community within nature.

The conclusion summarizes the finding of this study. It highlights Kidd's portrayal of feminine elements that serve for the construction of her black women voice in *The Secret Life of Bees*. It reviews the role of utopian matriarchal society against the authoritative masculine one.

Chapter One

DemarginalizingFemininity and Womanhood

“The feminine journey is about going down deep into soul, healing and reclaiming, while the masculine journey is up and out, to spirit.”

Mary Davis, Interview with Maureen Murdock; Summer 2005

This chapter is concerned with women's demarginalization in Kidd's novel *The Secret Life of Bees*. It investigates Kidd's assumption that support black woman empowerment. This study relies on Bell Hooks concept developed in her book *From Margin to Center* to bring the black heroine to center. This study as well puts into practice Collins' theory of 'Controlling Images'. It is also drawn on Maureen Murdock's notion of female heroism discussed in her book *The Heroine Journey*. This study investigates womanhood, spiritual recovery, self-foundation and healing process.

This study is based on Maureen Murdock's perception of heroism, and Michelle Foucault's Disciplinary and Discursive Discourse, and Patricia Hill Collins concept of 'Controlling Images'. The first section is called 'Relocating the Females' Characters Voices and Identities" it explains how women in general and black women in particular resist male heroism perspective. The second section is intitled 'Female Characters Moving to the Center' it study the way black women moved from the margin to the center. last section intitled 'Rebuilding the Self Through Femininity and Womanhood' sheds light on the decolonization of women's bodies specifically blacks women's bodies.

1-1-Re-Locating the females' Characters Voices andIdentities.

From the old legendary tales till twentieth century, heroic deeds were associated with manhood, notably the word heroism has been all along connected to man, whereas women and in particular women of color assumed a secondary role due to their gender. Joseph Campbell who is known for associating heroism with masculinity and manhood(3) states that the hero's journey is a "transition from boyhood to manhood" and there is "no parallel struggle in the development from girl to woman" (4). Alongside, he places women as a reward hero where he points that "the mystical marriage with the queen goddess of the world represents the hero's total mastery of life, for the woman is life, the hero is the knower and the master" (111). These hypothesis shows the influence of chauvinism on female position in literature and how male is placed as the master. According to him, man has more conspicuous role because of life conditions he is placed with public spheres "he is out in the world" whereas women's spheres have been domestic "and the woman is on home giving birth..." (79). That means that man is born to be hero and woman is "the angel of the house" (Frontgia 15).

The marginalization and subjugation of women gave birth to the explosion of feminism. In fact, heroin portrayal has increasingly improved in literature with the rise of feminist authors and theorists. Maureen Murdock has written *The Heroine's Journey* as a response to Campbell's *The Hero's Journey* where at her sight represents the heroine.

Many theorists and authors in fact refused Campbell's standpoint, Murdock for instance rejected his male pattern by crafting her female pattern with regard to heroism "his

model failed to address the specific psycho-spiritual journey of contemporary women” (Leemning 3). Thus, Murdock represents women as master in a spiritual journey of healing in patriarchy (Davis 7). She connects heroism with femininity, and creates her as archetype where femininity aspires her to integrate (Davis 5). Social behavior influences the feminine wound regarding feminine aspects such as body and emotions. In this regard what Murdock think about hero’s journey is that it is “up and out”, with a big splash to the light, while the heroine’s journey is “down and in” to the cave, to the “Black Madonna” (Davis 7). She presents her female heroine as being approved by some aspects and features as mother\daughter relationship, the feminine wound and the success of heroine as “being” instead of “doing” (Murdock 226). Hence, black female contemporary authors generally determine black women’s persistence against social cruelty as an act of being and not doing, and by breaking the conspiracy of silence that had oppressed their selfhood (Purkayastha 3-4).

As a contemporary writer, Kidd, in her novel tends to express the reality and the ability of both black and white female in proving their identity and femininity through a heroic journey in searching self-determination and esteem. Actually, she challenges the traditional male pattern adopting new patterns maintaining Murdock’s perception of heroism. In her selected text, *The Secret Life of Bees*, she conducts her white female protagonist, Lily, to narrate the story from her perspective, it is what summarizes her personal pain and loss she experienced. In her article titled “A Critical Study of *The Secret Life of Bees*” Joy A. Hebert contends that “what creates the magic in Lily’s narration is another of Kidd’s stylistic device: Lily’s ability to vacillate from poetic and humorous language to compelling dramatic language while wearing the hat of orphan,

fugitive, social commentator, historian, and smitten teen”(48). Kidd’s use of Lily’s narrative vigor shows an emotional and spiritual renewal for her protagonists Lily, Rosaleen, and the bee sisters, and identify a social awareness as well as psychological development they attend through their journey. As well as, it mirrors the strategies of women empowerment, black maternal relationship, and being the central figure of the novel. Besides Murdock’s heroine, Lily and Rosaleen declare that they need to go on a journey starting by moving from femininity exposed by society. According to Murdock, woman experience a period “of rejection of all feminine quality” twisted through the cultural lens as being detected as inferior, dependent and powerless (28).

In the same token, *The Second Sex*, by De Beauvoir covered the topic of how patriarchal society used to marginalize and devalue women in which it characterizes them as silent and passive with shameful and weak bodies. she often claims that “one is not born, but rather became, a woman” (283). Thereby, in order to challenge these social norms woman should deny her femininity and approach male sphere through embodying masculine traits. De Beauvoir on behalf of restoring feminine image, deliberately freed herself from femininity in which “she develops a bitterness and hatred toward femininity and maternal figure in her life” (Birch11).

Kidd’s female heroine has strongly inverted and rebelled the traditional perspectives in the matter of heroism and femininity. At a very young age Lily lost her mother and suffers from maternal lack. This lack leads Lily to start her journey of searching for truth where she met Rosaleen who appears in the story as the first mother figure, Hebert in this context comments that “at the beginning of the novel Lily perceives

Rosaleen as a protector-someone is willing to create a safe environment-something Lily desperately needs for her emotional growth” (14). with the process of events, Lily met August who taught her that if one’s mother is not earthly mother, there is always a heavenly mother (Theme 237).

Kidd portrays her protagonist as being traumatized by her mother’s loss and the story her father told her. This separation from her biological mother has been a great process, she has to detach herself from her (Murdock 30). Lily seeks acceptance and love in the black community that provides her with motherhood and spirituality, August for instance teaches Lily *The Secret Life of Bees* which includes the secret life of human life (Theme 237). Therefore, her mother rejection causes her to search for “unconditional love... and consequently to be bitterly disappointed” (Anderson 132).

Murdock’s conceptualization of heroism in fact undergoes a continuous search for healing and wholeness, she introduced a stage that she refers at as ‘Strong Woman Can Say No’ (Murdock 129). She stresses that the heroine can embrace the masculine traits (Birch 14). Murdock thinks that the heroine “decides to break with established images of the feminine she inevitably begins the traditional hero’s journey” (46). In the light of this, Kidd’s heroines depart in a heroic journey by demonstrating masculine spheres and find the depth of their soul, independency, and reclaim their fragmented self. In these, “women find their way back to themselves... by moving down into depths of the ground of their being. Her metaphor of digging the earth to find her way back to herself expresses woman’s initiation process” (Murdock 162). The sense of emptiness Lily experienced makes her in a state of constant melancholy and

discomfort. She finds comfort and support in Rosaleen, Black Mary, and the calendar sisters “you know, she’s really just the figurehead off an old ship, but the people needed comfort and rescue, so when they looked at it, they saw Mary, and so the spirit of Mary took over” (Kidd 141). According to Murdock the heroine should experience the psycho-spiritual in order to heal her feminine wound and bring up changes.

As mentioned above, Kidd’s main characters hold a great power over males and create their own world where they practice their freedom and desire without boundaries, they create “a world where men do not form the center of their world” (Latif 255). With the process of events, the female characters did not sacrifice their life to men but rather they keep full control of their life and independence. Hence, Lily’s and Rosaleen’s assumption for masculinity; search for healing and wholeness, validates that “skills learned during this first part of the heroic quest establish a woman’s competence in the world” (Murdock 52).

1-2- Female Characters Moving to The Center:

In the words of Mgdami Washington Black and white women, have made a glorious triumph in perpetuating women’s rights. Moreover, black women have been suffering from both sexism, and racism. By being completely marginalized, many Afro-American women did not have the right neither to free themselves, nor to express their realities. Thus, they still not have the right to live freely (6). She later adds that for many years black women have been treated differently from white women and black men. While the black woman is treated negatively, the white one is always getting the idealized aspects of womanhood (Washington 6). Therefore, it is mainly clarified that female

heroism for instance, was only serving the white female' healing process and femininity. However, the black heroism is constantly concerned with the healing journey of the black female's wounds. This later, included both their female and racial identities. In this light, the black heroine's journey of healing includes the search and the reawakening of the feminine nature. Jewell Gomez in her article entitled "Black Women Heroes: Here's Reality Where's the Fiction" comments that "unlike the traditional female figure, black woman is strong survivor. She controlled her life and will stop a little to achieve her goal" (10).

African American women carried the duty of re-locating the black females' characters destroyed image on their backs. *Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins is among the books that portray this goal. It discusses the discrimination and injustice experienced by black women. As women of color, Collins tried to voice her thoughts and break the stereotype of "mammies, matriarch, welfare recipients, and hot mommas" (69). In this context, black women authors through their writings moved the black female characters from the margin to the center. Accordingly, Hooks in *Black Feminist from Margin to Center* describes proclaims that black females represent "an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were necessary, vital part of that whole" (03). As a result, they moved to the center as a mean of empowerment, and revolt.

Agency and leadership are two prevailing aspects of the black heroine's move to the center. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Kidd extend a contemporary feminine awareness in which she allows her black female characters to reach a certain supremacy. Thus, the

heroines would be able to exercise self-consciousness through using their voice which "is not to be interpreted as submission" (Collins 98). In their book *"Shifting: The Double Lives of Women in America,"* Charis Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden affirms that by breaking the silence and being self-free black women will definitely "illuminate society's inequities" (99). As a result, they gain wisdom and knowledge which offer them the liberty of expression. Kidd gives her black heroines a powerful sense of self-definition as an act of resistance, Rosaleen and August inscribes their voice and presence on the master's house (Anderson 42). Rosaleen repressed her feminine wounds through escaping and "find her own way from now on" (Kidd 54). While August expressed her power through owning a business and live up to her name as "the mistress of bees" (Kidd 68). Additionally, the Boatright Sisters August, May and June as Afro-American women though being discriminated and subordinated, they succeed to create a surrounding full of independency, direction and solidarity. Rosaleen surprisingly declares "I never meet Negro women like them" (Kidd 80). She afterward adds while describing their house it looks as having "its own spot in the world" (Kidd 80). In spite of the constant existence of racism and discrimination the female characters debate the patriarchal boundaries, and attain a better status as central elements.

Kidd leads her heroines to the center by giving them agency of self-experience. Janett-Macauley argues that "black women's empowerment through self-definition" permit them to "come up with and transcend their oppression" (30). Certainly, Joy Hebert in his "A Critical Study of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*" asserts that Lily's narration "dramatize more clearly the racial discrimination replete within society

depicted in the novel (50). Thus, her method of telling lead to her coming of age. Moreover, Hebert clarifies that this genre of narration is characterized by characters' own experience and own narration, for example Lily apt to reveal her emotion because "she is the one experiencing it firsthand" (50). In *the Secret Life of Bees*, Kidd use of bildungsroman type reinforces women's center role in which her protagonists "can achieve true knowledge that ... carries with it an ethical authority and definitive selfhood" (Salvatore 157). The classical bildungsroman for instance provides a personal account of definite character in link with the environment. Furthermore, this genre pursues the protagonist's psychological and moral growth of maturity. Lily's bildungsroman as well adopts her psychologically and spiritually. She narrates all her personal experiences throughout different stages of her life. Her thoughts, feelings, and affections are all expressed as a central discourse. The African American building hero reveals a "personal and representational identity" (Foster 6). Kidd notably, donates her heroines a centered role as narrators as well as mentors of their journey. Lily and Rosaleen have mainly chosen to set their own path to accomplish their freedom through facing patriarchy. For instance, Rosaleen at first unfortunately was not easily able to transcend the patriarchal rules. Thus, though being educated, civilized and a free Afro-American woman, she was always perceived as an oppressed inhabitant. However, she no longer starts to pursue her self-esteem and deliverance. Consequently, the escapism towards Tiburon was her first step to her changeable journey. By doing so, she realizes her presence not only as a colored woman but also as a woman. In addition to reach an absolute healing development.

In Kidd selected novel, the heroines are demonstrated as a representative of true womanhood and femininity. Lily, for instance; dominates the narrative of the story with her agency and pivotal presence, as well as August who proved to be an immense story-teller. Lily's voice is specifically performed as a mean of narration. Thus, it is mainly used to conduct her own voice in particular, and the black voice in general. Rosellen Brown in her article "Honey Child" agrees that Lily's narrative voice in the text is commanding and insightful, it carries pleasure through her telling and lays out implicitly and emotional terrain which she has been through (11). She later argues that by the end of the novel Lily shows her solid identity (11). Therefore, Lily is the captivating force of the novel and her "voice and her plight... drive the novel" (Bloxam 198).

1-3- Rebuilding the Self Through Femininity and Womanhood

In order to defend the rights of the marginalized groups, Michelle Foucault introduces and develops theories throughout his writings. In his books *Discipline and Punish; The Birth of the Prison* and *The History of Sexuality* Foucault explains different concepts to analyze power and strength that dominate the human body (Ziarck 260). He develops both oppressive and disciplinary discourse. According to him oppressive discourse and disciplinary discourse determine the set of behavior that are applied in the restrict individual freedom in the society (146). Consequently, the oppressive and disciplinary discourse impact human behavior that are arrested with social policies to regulate powers' limit.

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily encounters oppression that influence her social life associated with human act and patterns. Thus, she could not associate and reach others because she is motherless. The unhappy life caused by human behavior and practice subjects her to oppression and impacts her psychological and physical development, as well depression due to the guilty death of her mother (Kidd 7). Furthermore, she recognized the fact that she is motherless which contradicts her freedom. As a result, she started a journey of searching motherhood to achieve that freedom. Kidd then, affirms the influence of gender as the cause why women struggle in their journey of femininity.

Kidd clarifies the strength of black women using black Mary's photo. It indicates the power of black women counter to oppression and sexist anecdotes required against them in the community. In the current text, Lily, who has been denying the extreme crucial rights to socialize and connect with her peers (Kidd 7), she is not able to meld with her peers as a result of social spheres. Therefore, she adopts strength and creativity to retaliate the oppressive discourse's effects. Besides, Rosaleen has rejected all her essential rights in the society as well like "attending church" (Kidd 8). For that reason, she uses her own strength and opportunities in order to fight oppression so she can free herself from the stereotypical community.

As reported by Norman Fairclough in his book *Discourse and Social Changes* "the notion of discourse refers to a view of language which regards it primarily as a social practice: language both constitute and is constituted by society" (90). He asserts that the discourse and its techniques are the products of others' aspects. The abusive

language in fact has been interpreted by Kidd in this selected novel. Lily for instance is threatened by social abuse more specifically the cruelty of her father who kept insulting her by calling her “little bitch” (Kidd 39). Besides, Rosaleen received a number of insults and harassments from white racists just because of her skin color.

With the process of events, the oppressive discourse continues in the novel in regard to Rosaleen. She has been verbally abused by three white men in the church. This later situation puts Lily in a questionable situation “that is what it means, but you gonna have to drag people kicking and screaming to do it” (Kidd 62). Appropriately, she is imprisoned and endure physical and psychological violence out there. Furthermore, Lily lives with language discourse that affected her psychological development “you make me up again, Lily and I’ll get out the martha whites, you hear me?” (Kidd 11). Thus, her father causes her psyche damages. Norman Fairlough describes language discourse by a frequent offense and constant form in the subject’s process “a group of ideas or shaped way of thinking which can be identified in textual and verbal communication... can also be located in wider social structure” (Fairlough 145).

According to Foucault, in language counter-memory practice the oppressed bodies are passive where they suffer in silence because they cannot fight back (Laila 238). In this context, Rosaleen as a black woman is subjected to many oppressions, yet, she is incapable to resist the society due to her inferiority. Thus, she has been refuted the crucial rights in society such as attending the church “we love the black people but they have their place” (Kidd 32). Likewise, May cannot adjust her feelings and obstacles.

After finding that Zach has been stopped, she puts an end to her life as a consequence of depression and loneliness.

Foucault again define how discursive and disciplinary practices influence the subject or the object through getting fragile and substandard “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to want it” (Foucault 101). In such manner, the oppressive discourse depicts Rosaleen’s powerless and exposed to any attack in the community. When the oppressive discourse spots human body it leads to sensational injury and sexual offense. Hence, June is not able to fall in love again because of her harsh experience with men.

The concept of disciplinary discourse studies the partnership with the oppressive discourse. It demonstrates the way characters experienced subjugation and oppression as a consequence of the whites’ discriminatory, racial, and sexist discourse. The female characters have been abused physically and verbally. According to Foucault, the “power centered on the body as a machine; its disciplinary, the optimization of its capacities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of the efficient and economic control, all this was insured by the procedure of power that characterized the discipline” (90). This concept, for instance, refers to the different forms of the black women bodies’ control among the novel. The Mammy term coined by Collins is factually linked to the body devaluation, where Rosaleen and August have successfully challenged and performed motherhood and womanhood. Additionally, it explores the power of white oppression over the black female bodies, and how it is depicted as a site of oppression.

Black women for a long time have suffered from white privilege. The intersectional knowledge of race and gender have been pertaining to the black female bodies and social politics. In this context, Collins in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* categorized black women into four ranks; the Mammy, The Jezebel, The Sapphire, and The Angry Black Woman. She applies the concepts to demonstrate and outline controlling images that depreciate black women's femininity and womanhood. The Mammy as a term refers to "the image of dark skinned and nurturing black women who were required to be domestic servant post emancipation" (12). In the light of this, Cherly Gilkes defends Collins points and said that "black women emerged from slavery firmly enshrined in the consciousness of white America as Mammy and had black women" (294). In the milieu of the dynamic of the controlling image, Collins portrays the controlling images as the colonization of the black bodies. These portrayals result in the societal stereotypical illustration of black women. (Thomas 426-442). Collins denotes the different status of black women's bodies colonization. She classifies the black bodies among the controlling image that declines their femininity and womanhood.

The main purpose of Collins' Controlling images is to maintain the racists deeds practiced on the black female bodies. In this notion, Collins states that "analyzing the particular controlling images applied to African American women reveals the specific contours of black women's objectification as well as the way in which oppression of race, gender, sexuality and class intersect" (72). This controlling images indeed, discuss the marginalization of black female bodies and womanhood. Therefore, sisterhood in this selected novel, appears as an instrument of decolonizing and

empowering the black female bodies. Kidd manifest the massive influence of the black female society as rebellion against the black male domination and racial discrimination. Hudson Weems, for instance, states that “there has always been bounding among Africana women that cannot be broken... genuine sisterhood. This sisterly bond is a reciprocal one, one in which each gives and receives equally” (Weems 19). The boatwright sisters understand each other and agree in every life sphere, and thud, August host her sisters besides Lily and Rosaleen. This fact enables the black women’s bodies to advance their rights in dominated society.

In The Secret Life of Bees, the black female characters demonstrate Collins’ illustration of the typical image of the black female. Collins portrays black woman with integrity such as loving and honesty as the mummy. In the selected novel, Rosaleen is presented as an admiring mother figure to Lily after her mother’s death. For instance, she assumes the role of lovely mummy who takes care of her children. Therefore, her power of motherhood marked her bodies liberation. She instructs her in many circumstances, alike when Lily craves her mother “but you know when I miss her the most” (Kidd 9). Consequently, Lily acknowledges that Rosaleen is the only woman who can be her mother instead of Deborah.

Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees* is considered as a journey of self-reclamation and reconstruction for the black female characters identities to resist white’s privilege. According to Caitlin Rose Riley Duttry “in order to reveal the importance of bodies in the protagonist’s journeys to self-liberation, we need to use black feminist criticism” (2). Rosaleen and August for instance, witness the liberation of the black bodies in

white dominated society. In this vein, Carol E. Henderson believes that the liberation of the black bodies “is basic to identity, self-image, and being in the physical world is the body, a source of conflict for black women whose ownership of its beauty, pleasure, and potential has been complicated where it has not been denied” (qtd. in Duttry 23). Kidd points out the mythical black figures of women. Rosaleen for instance, manifests all types of oppression of the black bodies. Thus, in the novel she is portrayed as a strong and independent woman in the novel. She is a typical black woman who emerges for minimal rights in the society such as vote. She is brave and confident in facing the harsh environment. Rosaleen in addition, defends and protects Lily from her cruel father because of her courage that allows her to face the discriminative society. Thus, mythical black figure of women is a mean of accomplishing equality in community. Black women illustrate the powerful leader of an independent life.

Kidd’s black female characters indeed, portray the typical image of Collins’ representation of the black woman stereotypical image. “The Mummy” as recorded by Collins, is an obedient and a loving mother (Collins 63). August’s position as a mother and a caregiver shows features of culpable woman. She supports Lily and her own sisters in her farm. She successfully guides Lily’s and May’s life. Therefore, the interpretation of mummy matches August’s acts of a loving mother for all female characters. Kidd, implies that black women are usually affiliated with vices like apathy and ignorance. These stereotypical matters rule the community in the novel. Lily for example, thinks that black women are the laziest persons of the society. However, her attitude differentiates throughout her journey. As a result, she recognizes that black women are productive and clever. August shows to Lily that despite being a black

woman she is able to carry on a successful business and being a teacher “looking back on it now, I want to say the bees were sent to me. I want to say they showed up like the angel Gabriel appearing to The Virgin Mary, set in events in motion. I could never have guessed” (Kidd 73).

The Mammy image attempts to form black women’s behavior as mother. The Mammy image stands for adversarial distinction of body and culture and hope to separate black women from other women. For instance, the Mammy represents the explicit pattern of motherhood in male chauvinist speculation. This concept, allude to the characterization of African women’s bodies and identities.

This chapter is concerned with the adaptation of the heroic deeds in female writings as a response to Joseph Campbell’s standpoint. that is to say that heroism is related directly to men. It studied Kidd’s narratological patterns that allows her protagonists to transcend the boundaries, as well as, brings her marginalized black female characters to the center. Furthermore, she challenged the patriarchal society by moving them from the bottom of social hierarchy to the empowerment status. Overall, this chapter explored the way how the black bodies are controlled beside being inferior to men, relying on the controlling images that seek to decline them. By applying this narrative patterns Kidd proves Black femininity and womanhood.

Chapter Two

Feminine Environmental Healing: The Decolonization of Women and Nature.

“Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization has become more and more men’s business”

Sigmund Freud, Civilization, and its Discontents: 80.

This chapter discusses the resistance of women and nature over the oppression of patriarchal society in *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd. It also concerns the spiritual, the natural, and the female deliverance and liberation through ecofeminist and feminist concepts. Additionally, it shows Kidd’s purpose in portraying both a new feminine and ecological dimensions for her main females’ characters, and for the black heroines specifically.

This chapter is built upon a number of ecological books, articles, criticism, feminist and ecofeminist theories like: Dualism and Domination, Ecofeminist Theory, Feminist Spirituality and the Spiritual Ecofeminism. The first section entitled ‘The Patriarchy Oppression of Women and Nature’ explains how women and nature are similarly oppressed by male authority, and how they successfully face certain obstacles. The second section entitled “Honey, Bees as A Feminine Healing Pattern” interprets the metaphorical meanings of symbolism used by the author, and the purpose of its suggestion. Finally, the third section entitled “Spiritual Connection Through Nature” that focuses on defining the spiritual connectedness with both the female and the natural world

2-1 The Patriarchy Oppression of Women and Nature

By late sixties ecological movements have started to spread out in the society with the help of literature, civil right movements, and women's right movements. Feminism, for instance; had mainly participated in the development of ecocriticism, therefore Ecofeminism represents a major brunch of ecocriticism. Francoise d'Eaubonne invented the term ecofeminism in 1974, she identifies patriarchal subjection with nature oppression. D'Eaubonne entailed feminists to associate with environment in order to create a new era which is post-patriarchal genuinely 'humanists', and ecologically sustainable future (213-252). According to the ecofeminist Charlene Sprentak ecofeminism is "a joining of environmental feminist, and women's spiritual corners" (5-6). Subsequently, Karen J. Warren clarifies in "Feminist Environmental Philosophy" that what makes ecofeminism distinct is "its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism are feminist issues" (Warren 4).

Ecofeminism focuses on an ecocritical theory that claims that female community and environmental one's issues are interconnected as a result of the objectification of women and nature in a male dominated society. According to this latters, the system pattern is based on a male centered and hierarchy. This masculine aspect has created a hierarchy that forms an inequality and has provided superiority of man in community. Hierarchy and dualities exert pressure and oppression on both non-male beings and natural ones by marginalizing them. Therefore, man is always perceived as exceptional to other features. The ecofeminists assert that nature and women are similarly conceptualized. The major purpose of their bond is that women have the capacity to be productive and creative as well as nature. In addition, that this latterschemes a harmony. For instance, women's responsibility is bringing humans to the world, while

nature affords them with the natural resources ensuring the continuity of life. Unfortunately, they both have a passive role in society. Women are always forced to acquire a domestic life and depends only on man. On the other hand, nature likewise represents a non-active being and be classified as a dependent on man.

Kidd supports the relationship between woman and nature and believes in the equality between them. she expresses her immense interests through the novel. She addresses the matter of the double oppression of man and women, and humans with nature. Besides the position of woman in nature, she provides the domination and subjugation of patriarchy that makes both woman and nature marginalized. Rosaleen for instance, dealt with all kinds of oppression. Because of being black woman, she got strongly beaten by a group of racist white men "that was when dealer lifted the flashlight over his head, then down, smashing it into Rosaleen's head" (Kidd 35).

According to western culture, women are commonly classified as secondary to men. Women in the novel are constantly anticipated as inferior to men. The female characters bear both mental and physical oppression by the patriarchal community. As a consequence, their psychological development and bodies are extremely impacted. Simone De Beauvoir introduces in *The Second Sex* what woman "is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her's she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject; he is the absolute__ she is the other" (16). Hence, women in the novel are obviously trying to seek their independence, and identities starting from escaping male chauvinism to mother nature.

Nature in *The Secret Life of Bees* has been centered as Kidd uses different natural motifs for certain attentions. These specific motifs characterize different emotions, ethics, and new feminine figure through an ecofeminist lens. Therefore, nature is mainly depicted to provide powerful coexistence of the heroines with their female community. Its employment plays major role in establishing a particular imagery. Kidd for instance, concedes the female and natural empowerment by demonstrating the harmony they create while living together, and that the continuity of this harmony is a major feminine archetype to heal the wounds of the female protagonists. Lily for instance; started “appreciating mother nature, what she’d done with the world” (Kidd 57). She has always related her life experiences, healing process, and morality to nature where “it was such a pretty sight for a second I forgot the heavy feeling I’d carried” (Kidd 57). Lily’s understanding to nature characterizes her experience. Through her journey, nature has been a measure for its development spiritually, emotionally, and morally.

Traditionally men have always been connected to culture and women to nature. Women connection to nature is not considered an affective relation, yet, it is treated as adomestic rationality. Genevieve Lloyd notes that the stance of women and nature associated with traditional identification has not always been as simple one (40). Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* adds This association provides a limited assertion of the two; women and nature (193). The traditional domination of men as reason and women as nature results the male oppression towards the female and the environmental world.

Women and nature's relation according to some ecofeminists is considered as conservative and abusive. In her famous feminist journal "Off Our Backs" Alice Echols, claims that reconsidering women as earth mothers is seen as a traditional connection between women and nature. Thus, it represents nothing than an implement of oppression, and "a relic of patriarchy which should simply be allowed to wither away now that its roots in an oppressive are exposed" (288). Moreover, this connection holds a principal matter for feminism as it establishes the position of women and nature in the modern community. Hence, this latter addresses an agreement that has finally determined and has shaped the ground for ecofeminism. By this accord, women knowingly insert themselves and become integrated with nature.

The main goal of the ecofeminists has been illustrated in the structures of dualism and domination to reach the roots of the oppression over women and nature. Additionally, to explore the connection between women and the natural world. This domination is particularly seen through men's oppression over women, and the oppression of human over nature. In this process, Victoria Davion asserts that: these are backgrounding, the oppressors' creation of a dependency on the oppressed while simultaneously denying that dependency; radical exclusion, constructing supposed differences between oppressors and the oppressed in terms of radical differences in order to justify subordination of the oppressed; incorporation, the construction of the devalued side of dualized pair as lacking morality relevant features associated with the other side..." (235).

Victoria Davion in *Is Ecofeminism Feminist?* Brings out that dualism depends on domination. For instance, *The Secret Life of Bees* counts differently on demonstrating two groups like male and female, and human and environment in order to interpret the domination of one over the other. Thereby the protagonist Lily has been dominated at the certain stage of her life by her abusive father. He in fact, ensures that Lily would be always terrified by him (Kidd 15). Susan Feldman by relying on Abraham Maslow in *Hierarchy of Needs* claims that Lily does not psychologically feel safe. He maintains that in order to progress she should be living in a “safe, secure environment” (326). Moreover, Iris Young in *Five Faces of Oppression* believes that this dualism is commonly existed in the patriarchal world which is seen through the lens of division and hierarchy (130).

Kidd primarily employs many ecofeminists principals that concern domination. Noel Sturgeon claims that “dualistic thinking, particularly distinctions between culture and nature, supports all kinds of domination” (67). She points that patriarchy inherently examines hierarchal issues or entities as nature, and it has to be seen equally through a feminist perspective. The main purpose of the novel is that male depends on men’s “experience in the natural world” and “other-ing understanding of nature” (Brisson 10). For example, the application of the natural elements indicate that the character’s life differs from what it seems to be, therefore, it might be much complicated. It is clearly explained when Lily “decides she and Rosaleen must flee Sylvan” (Kidd 39) to nature in order to get a safe life “and find her own way from now on” (Kidd 54).

The characters' life is associated with the connectedness with nature. It plays a fundamental role as a supportive element, creating different moods and processes. Nature in fact, signifies joy, freeness, and relief. The characters reached their self-reliance when they started to live away from the patriarchal society. Therefore, nature has a direct coexistence within themselves.

2-2 Honey and Bees as Feminine Healing Pattern

In the ancient Greek mythology Honeybees symbolizes the characters' names and signifies the Feminine Divine within themselves "the ancient gave the name of Melissa 'bees' to the priestesses of Demeter" in the words of Marija Gimbutas(182). The Greek goddess Demeter represents the goddess of earth, and agrarian fertility. She holds the power of life over death and the mother's love as well. In literary works, goddess Demeter is usually illustrated as the queen bee and her servants as Melissa. Additionally, Artemis' mythology "at Ephesus, Artemis was associated with the bees as her cult animal" (Gimbutas 183), bees connect goddesses of transformation with of regulation. Bees embody the beliefs that they were created from "the carcasses decomposing bulls oxen" (Gimbutas 181).

In *The Secret Life of Bees* Kidd relies on the mythical bees portrayed in the ancient Greek mythology. Therefore, in his article "Comparative Examination of Sacred Feminine Symbolism in *The Poisonwood Bible* and *The Secret Life Of Bees*" Amy R. Huseby sheds light on the metaphorical use of feminine symbolism in characters' names "Bees, Honey" in order to interpret their meanings in the novel. Kidd ties bees with women's life and establishes it as a spiritual journey "the sacredness of bees has a

long story in Greek ... Aristotle and others wrote that good souls can come back as Bees. To the Greek bees symbolized industry, prosperity, purity, and immortality” (Conway 229). Throughout the novel the process and the growth of the female character is mainly marked by serving the Black Madonna honey. As a result, she appears to be their source of nourishment and freedom. Lily asserts that August gave her “a lesson in what she called ‘bee yard etiquette’. She reminded me that the world was really one big yard” (Kidd 114).

Kidd gives her main protagonist Lily a name which has a reference to bees “I’m Lily Melissa Owens, I will not bow down”(Kidd 288). Lily portrays the vision of rebirth and renewal. Moreover, her mother’s name Deborah signifies bees as well. In fact, each female character represents the queen bee herself. Lily; for instance; is basically owning herself, and will not “bow down” (288). Actually, the divinity has already been within herself, August informs her that “she has to find a mother inside yourself”(288). This matter addresses the female’s mystery and sacredness. In Georgia Ann’s words “hanging upon the empowerment of women [is the concept] if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without” (205).

Lily’s full name “Lily Melissa Owens” (Kidd 52) exhibits that she is a part of bees in circling the goddess. Mathew Loar clarifies her mother’s name which signifies “bee” in Hebrew language (157). He confirms that “honey was seen as the sacred substance of the goddess, and the honey jar, the pithos, was a symbol of the Divine feminine wounds of creatures” (157). In the novel the three beekeepers’ sisters placed the honey jar next to the Black Mary statue, thusly, means that they consider her as the queen bee

for women. August in this regard explains to Lily that “the queen is their mother she is the mother of thousand” (Kidd 186). This latter, inherently indicates that the Black Madonna illustrates the queen bee, and represents mother figure for the heroines as well.

In the process of events, August reports that bees exist metaphorically and spiritually in the females’ characters life. She “heard the bees singing the words of Christmas story right out of gospel of Luke” (Kidd 179). The song seems to be similar to the one of “Daughters of our Lady’s rituals” in worshipping the Black Madonna. As a result, Lily recognizes that the beehives looklike the human beings’ lives. In this, August tells her that “bees have a secret life we don’t know anything about” (Kidd 184).

In the Secret Life of Bees, bees are repeatedly appeared as epigraphs in all chapters. In the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and Thesaurus epigraph is defined assaying or a part of a poem, a play, or book but at the beginning of writing to give the reader some idea of what the piece is about. This latter particularly includes values. The employment of bees means that the author has special intentions while transmitting the story. Guerin W.L claims that such pattern develops into explanation’s part in narrative (11). Kidd, for instance; adopts the characteristic of bees to narrate the humans’ life story. Therefore, she mainly has a certain aspiration in using epigraph. Bees are also applied as an appropriate emphasis. *In Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* X.J Kennedy and Dana Gioia exhibit a story teller can particularly give an emphasis to the symbol (219). Thus, it means that an object can be implicitly used by the author as a symbol and be a part of the novel as well. For

example, in *The Secret Life of Bees* Kidd proposes bees as an element of the title in order to show that she has a specific purpose and significance in maintaining them. Moreover, bees came out in different moments to reveal Lily's feelings and thoughts "the bees came the summer of 1964, the summer I turned fourteen and my life went spinning off into a whole new orbit, and I mean a whole new orbit" (Kidd21). In fact, that awareness appeared when Lily grew up and became youthful. Therefore, bees represent a sign that signifies the start of her journey. Bees again were engaged as "real bees" in the novel as it exists in the environment the characters lived in, and are considered as a major part of their life cycle.

Honeybees play a prominent role in Kidd's novel *The Secret Life of Bees*. The novel exemplifies the ecofeminist perspectives in which bees and beekeeping presents particularly socialist ecofeminist ideals. August, for instance; maintains her identity as beekeeper, thus, she has a strong spiritual and physical relation to bees. Since society depends on social structure as honeybee society, beehive is usually a metaphor for understanding human' social structures. In *The Social Organization of Honey Bees*; Mortensen Ashley. N and others demonstrate that Bees as insects live together in a large family and are thought-out "highly involved insects" which "depend on continual social interactions to survive" (1). This construction embodies the social ideal of social dependency and interconnectedness. Merchant Carolyn, as well, in *Feminism and Ecology* declares that Bees exhibit the ecofeminist connection between women's productive biology (nature) and male designed technology (culture) (11).

By the same token, Frank Hebert claims in *A Critical Study of The Secret Life of Bees* that Bees and honey provide Lily and Rosaleen with “spiritual healing” and “purification” in the Boatwright sisters house (8). August offers Lily security and stability in her everyday habits of beekeeping, this act led her to “shed her old life and begin anew” (8). As it were, Lily starts to understand beehive’s structure, which is illustrated in the queen bee as the center of the bees’ existence. This matriarchy in both beehives and the pink house gives Lily “freedom and redemption” from the patriarchal world she came from (8). The pink house where Rosaleen for instance; holds the honey power. When Lily runs into Tiburon, she conceals in the honey house and uses the honey jars to handle her anger (Kid 316). When all jars are smashed, she felt a deep sadness and guilt and yet Rosaleen rescues her “I looked down the picture, then closed my eyes. I figures May must’ve made it to heaven and explained to my mother about the sign I want it. Th one that would let me know I was lived” (Kid 748). Therefore, she managed her anger and guilt she used to live in, and started her journey to recover and grow. Honey’s interpretation moreover, is contend as healing pattern and purifying power.

The honeybees pattern embodies solidarity and collective work. It is demonstrated through the protagonists’ status and relationships in the community. One of these patterns clarifies that “a honeybee is just over a centimeter long and weighs only about sixty milligrams; nevertheless, she can fly with a load heavier than herself.” (Kidd 446). Thus, it is related to Lily’s experience that shows her capability to face reality. Lily had to know that her mother abandoned her after having a fight with her father, and that she is one who shot her mother accidentally.

2-3 Spiritual Connection Through Nature.

In words of Diann L. Neu in her *New Feminist Spirituality*, spirituality represents in a particular way the power and the spiritual influence of the self and within the self(40). Thus, spirituality is not only linked to religion or based on sacring the Divine. According for Leland R. Kaiser for instance, in “Spirituality and Physician Executive” argues that spirituality is not always connected to traditional religion, and could even completely not (6). He affirms that spirituality is more likely to be a connection between the self and something much larger like the universe and the world functions (Leland 6). Wanda K. Mohr and Allan Tasman, in “Religion and Spirituality” as psychologist interpret likewise spirituality as “a person experience, or belief in, a power apart from his or her own existence” (53). However, by the New Age era spirituality has been signified differently from the two latest approaches. According to Robert Coler it is the search for meaning in life events and the turning for connectedness to the universe (Mohr and Tasman 53). In fact, spirituality also includes the growth of finding the Divine within the self through spiritual feminist lens. In her famous book *Women's Spirituality, Women's Live* Diann L. Neu asserts that spirituality came as an independent, powerful, and valuable dignity for women (10). It primarily explains the connection between women and the Devine in which women consist goddess' qualities to accomplish their empowerment. Thus, they would be able to free themselves from the patriarchal as a way of healing and personification. According to Paul Heelas, one of the New Age scholars, the immense of Goddess inside every creature's soul is among the major spiritual features (8). Additionally, Ragnar Skottens, a famous theologian, asserts that “God is inside man's inner being” rather than “simply

out there” (20). As a result, all human beings are asked to search within themselves to find God (Skottens 20). In the feminist spirituality the immense of Goddess in every woman is centered. Therefore, it is mainly created to interpret modern aspects for the female community introducing a new spiritual feminist sphere.

In Kidd’s novel spirituality is mainly one of the most existed elements. It is generally demonstrated on the Devine’s reflection including Black Madonna. Therefore, the presence of the Goddess is crucial for Kidd’s females’ characters’ healing process, love and caring. Thus, Black Marry has a meaningful aspect on heroines’ lives in which she is portrayed as an admirable character, Lily for instance; defines Marry figure as a “muscle of love” (Kidd 374) in order to express the spiritual attachment and how she finally finds out the reason of her own existence. Lily’s affections by the Black Madonna have been stated by Kidd as well. As an example, the presence of Black Madonna constantly touches and affects on both Lily’s soul and thoughts “she was a mix of mighty and humble all in one. I didn’t know what to think, but what I felt was magnetic and so big it acted like the moon had entered my chest” (Kidd 134). She even depicts her as a mother while addressing her “my mother of thousands” (Kidd 291). On the other hand, August’s education for Lily is maintained as well to explain how Black Marry is valorized and having identity as a woman. Additionally, to consider her as mother for humanity, more likely to be the one for the daughters of Mary who have the same color as her “everybody needs a God that looks like them” (Kidd 175).

The new pattern of Marry is not only associated with black femininity but also womanhood. “Black as she could be” illustrates a main symbolic affirmation for this

latter. The female protagonist's connection with black Goddess is constantly represented as a mean of empowering and faith. For example, by being a faithful woman; August succeeds to get her sister's May suicide and has the strength to heal and empower herself to finally provide care and support for her family's member. Hence, Black Marry portrayal is mainly perceived as an inspirational source in the females' characters community. It appears to be there mean of relief, faith, and fearlessness.

By the same token Spiritual Ecofeminism came by ecofeminists like Starhawk, Riabe Eisler, and Carol J. Adams as a modern type of Ecofeminism that concerns spirituality. It was termed by Starhawk in 1990 as "Earth-based spirituality" in which she admits that all humans are elements of a large area in an alive earth (267). Therefore, Spiritual Ecofeminism is not related to a specific religion, but connected to certain values of affection, grace and non-violence. Antique traditions, like worshipping Gaia, the Goddess of nature and spirituality, are regularly acknowledged by the ecofeminists as well. In her *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine* Stark claims that religions as Wicca and Paganism particularly have a considerable impact on the Spiritual Ecofeminism (86). Charlene Sprentak in her first international conference on Ecofeminism, "Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Flowering" cites that Wicca's cores focuses on the value of community, admiration for nature and feminine attitude (96). Therefore, Spiritual Ecofeminism involves a spirituality that is performed as the Devine Feminine. Thus, it includes not only Feminism but also Environmentalism in which intends to challenge the patriarchal perspectives and beliefs. In "Power, Authority and Mistry: Ecofeminism and Earth-based Spirituality" Starhawk affirms that "the immanence of Goddess in the

living world, connectivity of mind, body and nature, and a compassionate life style” are mostly the essential concepts of Ecofeminism Spirituality (73). In this context, Poo Ottuh declares that many ecofeminists promote to abandon the traditional religions and beliefs and practice earth-based spiritualities, in which they celebrate nature (176).

Several female writers apply “The Devine Feminine” as a representation to the Spiritual Ecofeminism. According to Simonis Sampedro Angie in *The Feminist Goddess: The Movement of Spirituality of Women During the Second Wave*; they identify it as “earth-based” in which the immanence is superseded over transcendence, and God is illustrated as Goddess (25). She adds that it generally includes healing as well (45). Moreover, the ecofeminist spiritualities introduce new non-dominance basis in order to affirm their affiliation with nature. In “A Feminist Philosophical Perspectives on Ecofeminist Spiritualities”; Karren J. Warren maintains that ecofeminist spiritualities associate the interconnection, eco-dependency, and certain psychological significances with principals that differ from the patriarchal ones, and then relate them to nature (26). The spiritual ecofeminists debate the anthropocentrism of Christianity that concerns the patriarchal belief of one God. Thus, they arouse the ancients’ beliefs of matriarchy and denomination of the God Mother as a pattern of potency, and also based on animism philosophy. Furthermore, Martin Stoddart and David, B. Tindell claim that Spiritual Ecofeminism proponent refuse the andocentric of the universal perception and came up with a new ecocentric view of the world (342). According to the spiritual ecofeminists as Rosmary Murray Ruther in *Goddess and The Devine Feminine: A Western Religious History*; God’s mythology presents only patriarchal ones that are affiliated with a comparison of matriarchy and patriarchy

authors (49). They particularly acknowledge the Goddess psychomotor to coordinate the connection between women and nature, besides, the support the revival of ancient religions. Hence, spiritual ecofeminists advocate Goddess worship in which women and environment are regarded as sacred religious beliefs (Saydee and Beder 31).

The employment of Black Madonna figure in Kidd's novel represents her mindset about the Devine as feminine. In fact, the Black Madonna portrays the Virgin Mary which is seemingly attributed as "black" (Boos 77). In hi book *The Cult of The Black Virgin Mary*; Ean Beg agrees that mostly 450 portrays of Black Mary exist worldwide (3). The black Mary is a principal feminine pattern in the novel. She is essentially considered as a mean of guidance and empowerment for the heroines. For instance, it has an evident aspect on Lily's growth and spiritual process. Lily would not know what would have happened if she "hadn't seen the Black Mary picture" (Kidd 201). August likewise acquires her faith from the Black Madonna existence as it is demonstrated by her ability to accept May's loss and moves on. Moreover, Rosemary Murray affirms that Black Madonna represents a source of resistance as well to each female characters in the patriarchal society she says "the Black Madonna serves to subvert patriarchal monotheism to compensate conscious attitude of Christianity, to signal the reemergence of the feminine, and to complete the symbolic portrayal of the God head by bringing to it both feminine principal in its fullness and the principal of matter and darkness" (2).

In this vein, Kidd promotes the celebration of the Feminine Devine within the self. Thus, she challenges the common image of God and establishes a new feminine

form. In an interview Kidd declares that The Feminine Devine is the feminine Face of God and that it is the aspect of the Devine that we can visualize in a female form. Black Mary as a Goddess contributes female worthiness, empowerment and glorifies the feminist status through different aspects. Lily for instance; is inspired spiritually and emotionally throughout the story. She acknowledged the Devine within herself and feels her mentor. Therefore, she admires her not only as a “great Goddess Mother”, but also as a “Maternal Figure” (Amy R and Husby 15). In addition, the Devine’s appearance allows her to reach a certain recovery from her bad experiences. August, on the other hand, feels her belong to the Devine as she believes that she also “can come in a dark skin” (Kidd 175), and yet, to the daughters of Mary. In his article “Girlness Made Powerful: The Devine in Female Form”; Christopher Pramuk agrees that “what Black Mary does for the daughters of Mary is what no white male image of God could do, reflecting their own inherent dignity, strength and, beauty, and redeeming their suffering from within” (9). Therefore, the Devine symbolizes “healing” and “empowering presence” (Primuk 22).

Kidd succeeds in recommending the Devine as a feminine feature to ascend the spiritual pattern of women. Thus, she proclaims a revival for female form of God in order to glorify femininity. Hence, she brings out both the modern feminist and eco-feminist ethics, ideologies, and philosophies as a reaction to the traditional masculine beliefs toward femininity’s patterns.

This chapter has dealt with the challenge of the natural and the female world to the patriarchal system. thus, is has mainly examined the ecofeminist methods Kidd has

relied on to face the traditional patriarchal beliefs and concepts. In order to go against the masculine authority, Kidd has demonstrated the liberation of her female characters through a natural connectedness. Additionally, to a spiritual rationality and belong to the divine as a mean offeminine empowerment. By applying these techniques Kidd has successfully represented a new feminist portrayal to the heroines with regard to ecofeminism and spiritual ecofeminism norms.

Conclusion

The purpose of this general study is to investigate the decolonization of the heroines' voices, identities and bodies in Sue Monk Kidd *The Secret Life of Bees*. It demonstrates the black feminism and the ecofeminism perspectives. This study mainly

discussed Kidd method in representing the heroines as central characters. In doing so, she has transcended the masculine heroic deeds that used to marginalize and rule black women. Moreover, Kidd demonstrates a literary principal of heroism by making her female protagonist as a personal narrative in which she leads the feminine aspects which have largely been an affective technique to keep women in the spotlight. On the other hand, this study suggests the use of symbolism as a metaphorical tool to signify the feminine pattern. In addition, to the feminine representation of God illustrated in Black Madonna. Hence, this study extends the female healing journey of transcending the boundaries as a site of empowerment.

The first chapter addresses the patriarchal oppression of women and how femininity and womanhood are neglected. This chapter has drawn on several concepts and theories. Heroism conceptualization, and the controlling images for instance, show the decolonization of women' minds and bodies as a mean of resisting patriarchy. It investigates the way women in general and the black women in particular revolt against the male dominated society by breaking the silence in Kidd's novel. Racism implicitly attempts to interpret the oppressive discourse experienced by the female protagonists.

The first chapter has been conducted based on Maureen Murdock's conceptualization of heroism, Bell Hooks *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* and Patricia Hill Collins 'Controlling Images'. The first section of this chapter has explained the way male heroism is seen as dominant, this fact leads feminist authors to challenge the heroic deeds and introduce female heroism in literature. Heroism conceptualization offers a map of the feminine healing process and defines women's search for

wholeness in society dominated by masculinity. The second section has focused mainly on the relocation of women from being marginalized to being centered using agency and leadership as a mean of self -empowerment. Lastly, the third section sheds light on the stereotypical image of black women and body.

The second chapter has dealt with the ecofeminist aims employed in the novel with regard to the patriarchal oppression over woman and nature. It has discussed the definition of ecofeminism and the doble domination of woman and nature. Sturgeon Noel concept of Domination, in addition to symbolism and spirituality are necessary to interpret Kidd's novel. This chapter has examined the ecofeminist consciousness of Kidd to report the heroines' spiritual healing.

The first section of this chapter has studied ecofeminism's theory and its connectedness with the events of the novel. Moreover, it studied the domination and subjugation of patriarchy that makes both women and nature marginalized. The second section has concerned the symbolic interpretations of honey and bees as feminine healing pattern. It has shown the hidden meanings of this employment. Lastly, it has demonstrated a certain spiritual connection to Black Madonna.

Thus, it has clarified the healing process of the female characters through spiritual belonging to the Divine.

Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* demonstrates the transformative journey of a group of female characters moving from the stage of weakness and oppression to the stage of strength and self-affirmation. This dissertation has suggested

how Kidd illustrated a modern feminine sphere to the female characters that differs from the traditional beliefs of patriarchy. The contemporary and the ecofeminist novelist has successfully depicted both black and white women's realm in literature. Finally, Kidd aimed to create an impressive portray of femininity and womanhood in her selected novel by means of centralization of the female characters.

The conducted dissertation has relied on two major literary theories; black feminism and ecofeminism discussing the processes. This study can be inspiring to the next works since it has provided an interesting information and data concerning patriarchy versus matriarchy. Unfortunately, Ecofeminism though being a fascinating theory that could be depended upon in several literary works, studies and researches it does not have this a high turnout.

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Résumé

En vivant dans une société dominée par l'homme, la femme est considérée comme un objet. Pour amener ses héroïnes au centre ; Sue Monk Kidd montre l'incroyable pouvoir des femmes en tant que leader de leurs journées, dans son roman *La Vie secrète des Abeilles*. Basée sur Maureen Murdock conceptualisation de l'héroïsme féminine, Patricia Hill Collins 'Contrôle des Images', ainsi que, l'écoféminisme, cette thèse vise à réviser et mettre en évidence les actes héroïques du roman concernant la race et le sexe. En outre, la libération de corp et de voie comme un site de pouvoir féminine. Enfin, elle interprète le symbolisme du miel et abeille ainsi que métaphore de vie, et la représentation féminine de dieu illustrée en la vierge noire. Dans son cheminement vers le guérison et l'autonomisation, l'héroïnes de Kidd a rejeté les images péjoratives attribuées à la féminité. C'est pourquoi, elles ont transcendé les frontières à travers leurs éveil spirituel et physique en tant que figure de proue de leurs parcours, et plus important, a travers leurs éveil racial en tant que femmes de couleur dans une société raciste et patriarcale.

ملخص

من خلال العيش في مجتمع يهيمن عليه الذكور، أصبح ينظر الى النساء على انهن أشياء ورموز لا تمتلك الحق في التعبير عن صوتها وتحرير جسدها. في هذا النطاق، لجأت سيو مون كيد الى تجسيد البطلات الرئيسية بالقوة النسوية و جعلها قائد الدفة في رحلة التشافي، حيث تناشد الكاتبة الى تفكيك الصورة التقليدية للمرأة و تحريرها من الابوية من خلال روايتها الحياة السرية للنحل 2002. بناءا على نظرية مورين موردوك البطولية وباتريسيا هيل كولينز الصور المسيطرة عليها وميشال فوكو الخطاب الخطابي والتأديبي. يهدف الجزء الأول من هذه الاطروحة الى مراجعة البطولة بالنظر الى الجنس والعرق، بالإضافة لتحرير الجسد من الصورة التقليدية، كما انها تبرز قوة خطاب المرأة. كما يهدف الجزء الثاني من الاطروحة الى تحليل محتوى الرواية من خلال عدسة النسوية البيئية. الى جانب تفسير رمزية العسل والنحل كاستعارة للحياة. وأخيرا، تناول موضوع حضور مريم السوداء كنمط شفاء انثوي.